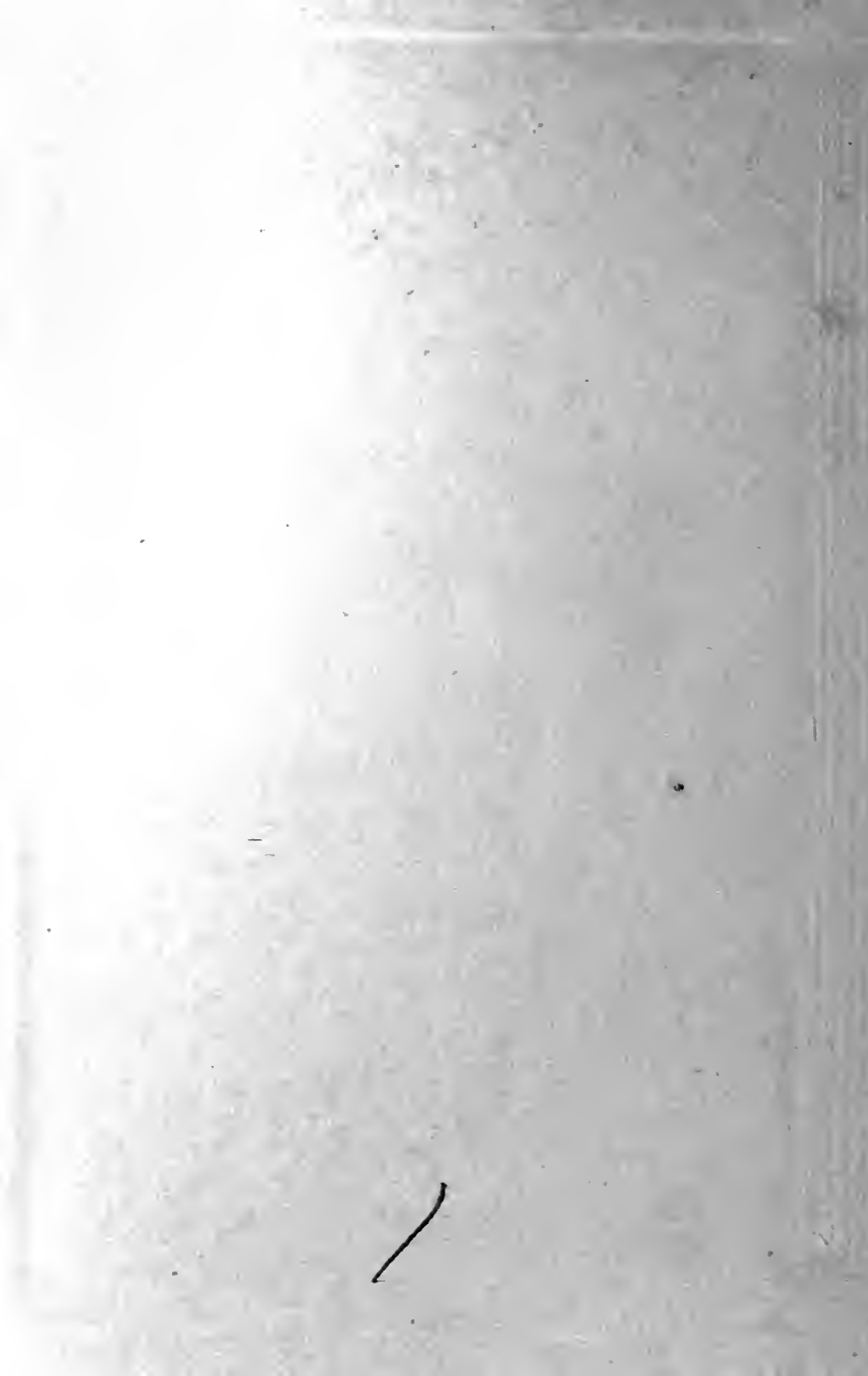






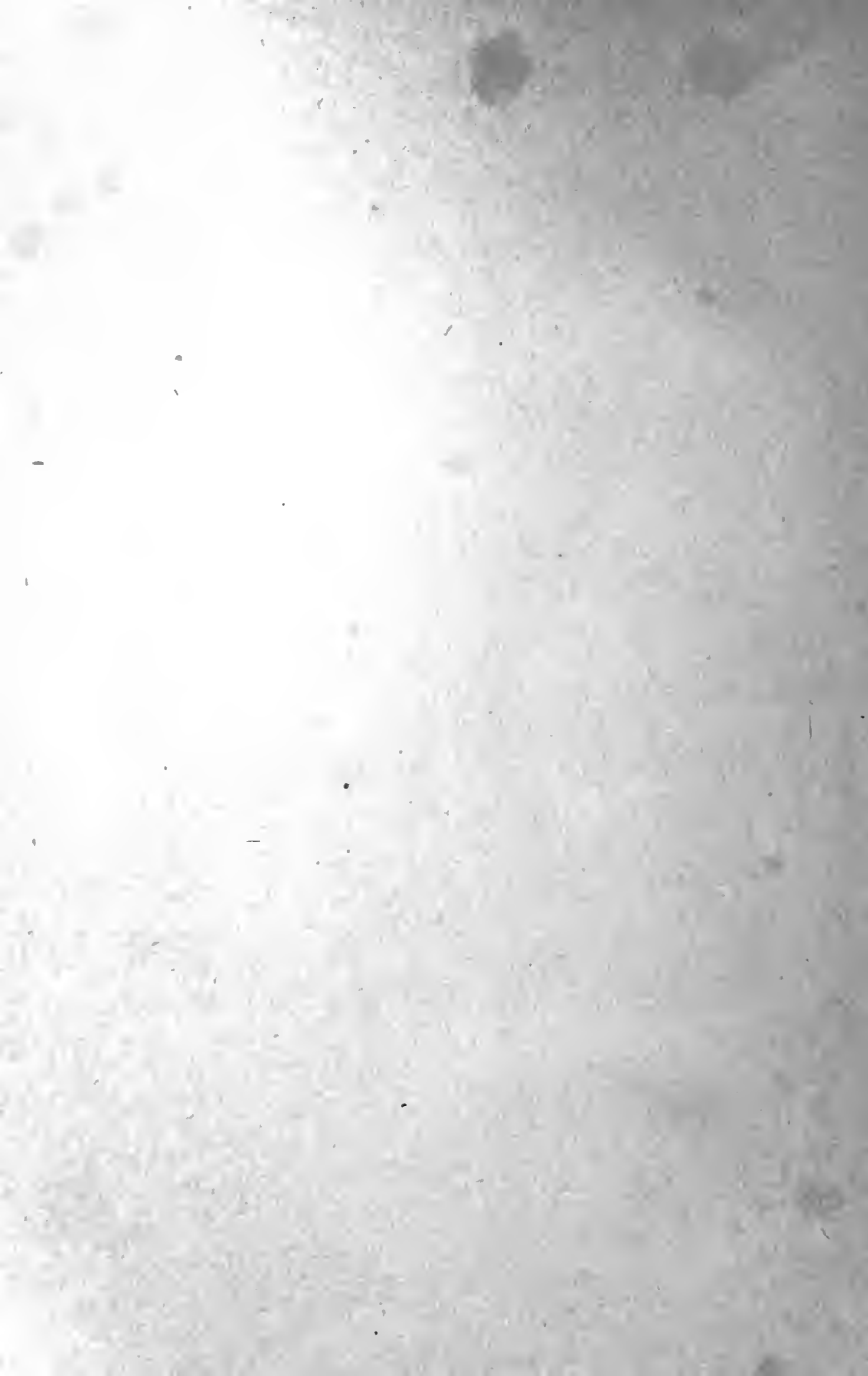
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AS ANDREAS FIRED, THE COUNT'S FIGURE TOTTERED
AND FELL BACKWARD OVER THE CLIFF

A BIRD OF PASSAGE

BY
GRACE STAIR



BOSTON
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**TO
MOTHERS**

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A BIRD OF PASSAGE

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CHAPTER I

I

SOMEWHERE below stairs in a narrow stone house on the Bendler Strasse a bell jangled, and in the second floor back-parlor a group of children stopped their play to listen. Amid shouts and squeals of mirth, they opened the door just as their mother, on the other side, was about to turn the handle, and into the room came a slim little thing in a plaid dress, blue coat and hat. Her coppery-brown hair was flying and her brown eyes danced as she flung her arms around the girl in "grown-up" clothes, who was her own age.

"Bertha!" There were more squeals and exclamations while the other children jumped up and down and clapped their hands in an honest effort to make the general clamor proportionate to the warmth of the visitor's welcome. This little girl they knew to be Olga von Kranz, who had been sent from Russia to spend the winter at their sister Bertha's school in Berlin. Now school was over and Olga was to visit her friend for a few days before being taken to Russia for the summer.

Bertha reached for the blue hat. "I'm playing lady and there's a long skirt for you. Come on, hurry up!"

"So, so! Is that the way to speak to a little guest?" interrupted Frau Kaufmann. "And not so much noise, darlings." The children only laughed more than ever. "Well, have a good time at your play. After a while we will have a little tea party in honor of Olga."

"Oh, goody, goody, goody!" they chorused again. And soon they were settled down to play, Ernest, the brother, drilling leaden soldiers on the carpet, "Ein, zwei; ein, zwei!" and Cousin Rena helping the two little ones with a picture puzzle. Bertha and Olga pretended to be grown-up ladies calling upon one another.

Presently a man's firm steps sounded on the stair outside. Herr Kaufmann! Would he pass on, or would he come in to see the children? Involuntarily they ceased playing to look at one another. The foot-steps stopped, the door opened, and Ernest sprang to his feet in salute before the tall, stern-faced man who appeared. Gravely the little girls made formal curtsies. Herr Kaufmann, in a genial mood, laughed in kindly fashion.

"So! You are all playing happily here, eh?" he asked, in the hard, deep voice so well suited to his personality.

"Yes, father," answered Bertha. "Olga is Frau Rath. She's calling on me."

"Wie gehts, Frau Rath?" he responded, bowing to the child, who thrilled at this distinction. "And what do you do with the soldaten, Ernest?"

"I'm having the spring manoeuvres, father. This is the Emperor. He's come to see the other soldiers march."

"Nun! How would all of you like to come with me and see a review to-morrow? But first you shall answer me a

few questions. You must not forget your lessons through the summer, you know." The children did not seem surprised, having apparently anticipated some such condition to their pleasure.

"Bertha, on what day was the glorious battle of Sedan?"

"September 2, 1870, papa."

"Sehr gut! Ernest, name one of the enemy generals at the Battle of Sedan."

But from Ernest came no quick reply. As the rest looked at him, his face flushed to the roots of his blond curls. He sent an appealing glance at his father, and saw no help nor mercy in a face grown more than usually stern. With the toe of his brown boot he dug into the carpet.

"Stop doing that!" snapped Herr Kaufmann. "I am waiting."

"I don't know, father," faltered Ernest at last, venturing another glance.

Quick as the eye could follow, Herr Kaufmann struck his son's face a resounding thwack, and white marks of his fingers appeared on the pink cheeks as the boy's head was jerked back by the surprise and vigor of the blow. A faint cry escaped between his lips.

"What! You are going to cry, too?" shouted Herr Kaufmann. "A son of mine does not know the name of Prussia's vanquished, and cries when you ask him! I wager you do not know the name of His Imperial Majesty, even. Here! I'll give you something to cry about." The other hand flew up against Ernest's head

with a force that sent him in a little heap among his valiant lead soldiers. This time the boy did not cry out, but lay still, with his face buried in his arms.

The girls cowered in silence, waiting.

Herr Kaufmann strode across the room to the bookcase, without a glance at the child on the floor. He chose a volume, whipped over a few pages, then spoke sharply, "Bertha! Come here!"

The child sidled stealthily toward him, like a dog expecting punishment.

"Here, in this book, is something for you children to learn. You will take this and begin at once. Those who can recite it to me to-morrow morning will go to the review, but the others will stay home in disgrace. As for Ernest, he will not go at all. He will know the poem by this evening or be caned, and while the rest of you are at the review, he will stay here and write it for me ten times.

"What would the Emperor say if he knew that a son of mine was such a dummkopf?"

Then he read sonorously:

"Es war einmal ein jübel tag,
Bei Sedan fiel den grossten schlag.
MacMahon war ins Gern gegangen,
Der Kaiser und sein Herr gefangen."

"I suppose you know who is meant by 'der Kaiser'?" he looked ominously at the children. "Bertha!"

"Please, papa, it was Louis Napoleon, Napoleon the Third," responded her timid voice. Bertha was notoriously good in history at school.

"Do you hear that, young man? Your sister should have the soldiers to drill. Hers is the spirit of which Germany is proud. Men and women like her and not dolts like yourself have made the glorious Empire what it is; they give it promise for the future.

"I will leave the book. Begin at once to study the lines, all of you."

Handing the book to Bertha and giving Ernest a push with his boot as he went past, Herr Kaufmann left the room. When the door had closed Bertha rushed to her brother and pulled his arms away from his face. Glassy and staring, the boy's eyes were bright with rage and pain and fear.

"You heard?" said she, quickly. "Come, you must take the book. We'll all begin saying the poem together. Father is very angry."

Ernest sat up and glared about him. A long, sighing sob came up from the depths of his wounded and agrieved spirit. "Verdamnte Franzosen!" said he, uttering the mighty oath with a solemnity that startled Olga, expecting the timid words of a trembling, penitent boy. "Some day I will kill one of them, or the English swine, to pay me for this." She thought how strange and horrible it was to hear such words from the soft red lips of Bertha's brother.

Playing was forgotten for the rest of that long dreadful afternoon, while the children sat around the table, repeating the verses. Olga sat with the others, mechanically learning the lines; but her child's heart rankled with the unfairness of Ernest's treatment.

Her father and mother were both dead and Olga was

glad that she had no father, if they were all like Herr Kaufmann.

Within two or three days, however, the incident seemed to have been forgotten by everyone save Olga. The whole affair was like a summer thunder storm, fierce and black and terrible while it lasted, but leaving no trace when the sun shone again, excepting perhaps where a murderous shaft of lightning had marked a growing tree.

II

Then came Fraulein Weinau, to take Olga to her uncle's estate near the city of Pskov, in southwestern Russia, where Michael Serov managed the extensive property belonging to his sister Alix in England, Marie and himself. At present Marie's share was being held in trust for her child by Michael and a sister-in-law, the Countess Soscha Hohenwald, attached to the suite of the Archduchess Valerie at the Austrian court. The little girl Olga had been left an orphan at the age of two years when the overturn of a coach on one of the mountain roads in Austria had resulted in the instant death of both her mother and father. Michael was growing tired of staying in Russia, and had announced his desire to sell the land and remove to the south of France, which offered more diversions than horseback-riding, an occasional card game, or a flirtation with a pretty peasant. The wooded hills and picturesque streams of his native country no longer had power to charm him, and summer was no better than winter, with the added responsibility of caring for a little niece who baffled Serov with the steady gaze of her brown eyes and her searching questions.

III

Olga had been in Russia for about a month and a half when one afternoon she was left to amuse herself while Uncle Serov rode about the two or three villages on the estate along the highroad a mile or so to the west of the "great house." Fraulein Weinau, her governess, was spending a week with friends in Pskov, and Sophia, the maid, who was supposed to look after Olga, was busy about her own affairs, so the child had settled herself with a box of colored pencils and some paper at the table in her uncle's library on the second floor. It was rather gloomy there, lighted only by long narrow windows, curtained at the sides with red velour and shaded outside by thick pine trees whose branches almost brushed the glass. For a while she drew steadily, sitting with one foot beneath her on a high cushioned chair, but after a time the silence and dim light in the sombre room began to affect her.

Two big tears had already formed in the brown eyes, when there was suddenly a furtive, shuffling noise in the direction of her uncle's bedroom, which adjoined the library. The tears splashed unheeded down Olga's cheeks as she turned her head in time to see a small figure scurry past the open bedroom door. Olga wriggled out of the chair and crossed the room noiselessly.

From the doorway she was just in time to see a scrawny arm and a thin, dirty hand reach around the corner of the mahogany high-boy at the right of the entrance. Fascinated, she watched the fingers fasten upon a heap of crumpled bank notes and coins lying carelessly on top.

Stealthily the fingers and their booty disappeared. Olga went hurriedly around the big piece of furniture, nearly knocking over the figure preparing to make a dash across the room for freedom.

“What are you doing?” demanded Olga, with her best semblance of stern dignity. “Don’t you know it’s wrong to take what doesn’t belong to you?” Into her mind flashed a picture of Herr Kaufmann standing wrathfully over the prostrate Ernest. Think how he would treat this culprit!

Thus addressed, the figure stopped, crouching against the side of the high-boy. Olga saw a girl a trifle older than herself, obviously of the peasantry, and dressed in a pitifully worn frock, with a thin shawl over her head and shoulders. She was barefoot, and there were bruises and streaks of dried blood from scratches along her skinny legs and over her feet. Yet she was not an ugly being, for even her wretchedness could not detract from the glory of two grey eyes that grew wide and beautiful with fear as she looked up at Olga. They held no appeal, save the faint hope of the dumb beast who thinks of pardon even as the descending lash whistles through the air. Olga was surprised at the silence and non-resistance which greeted her outburst.

“What were you doing in my uncle’s room?” Coming close to the girl, she leaned over and hissed: “I’ll call Baba Yaga from the pine woods and she’ll eat you alive, if you don’t give back that money.” No response.

Baba Yaga, witch of fable, made no impression on the little peasant’s mind; other consequences were more possible than the appearance of a mythical hag, and Uncle

Serov's name would have been even better than a witch's for inspiring terror. Olga tried another method of attack.

"Wouldn't your mother be ashamed of you, if she could see you?" Having no mother herself, she fancied that to make one's mother sorry was a very grave wrong.

At the word "mother," the young stoic's fortitude broke and her lower lip quivered. After all she was little more than a frightened child. "This is for her." She stretched out a dirty hand full of rumpled notes and the coins.

"Why does your mother let you take money?" asked Olga, indignantly. "Doesn't she know it's wrong? Doesn't your papa give her any?"

"Mama doesn't know I've taken anything. Papa had to buy himself a greatcoat and pay the tax, and there isn't any money left. Mama is sick and she needs good soup to drink." She opened the other hand with a gesture of despair. "I took this chain first. I meant to sell it to Rindskoff, the old Jew in the village. He never asks where things come from."

"Why doesn't your father buy food? And a decent dress for you, and shoes? What does your father do?"

"He's your uncle's coachman."

"Oh, is Stephan your father?" asked Olga, in amazement and relief. "That's all right, then. I'll just tell my uncle to give you some money."

Unreasoning terror filled the face of Marya, daughter of Stephan Georgovitch. She flung herself at Olga's feet and sobbed wildly, "Don't tell him! Please don't tell him! I'll give you the money and the chain, and my

mother can die, but don't tell your uncle. Please, please, please!"

"What is your name?"

"Marya," sobbed the girl.

"Well, Marya, don't be so silly! I don't mind asking uncle for money or food for you. He'll help you and your mother will get well."

"No, no!" wailed the other, in a perfect agony of fear. "Don't tell him!" Then Olga, without more ado, sat down on the floor beside the weeping Marya.

"You must tell me, you know," she said sympathetically. "Only you mustn't be so afraid of my uncle. Why should you? He's a very kind man. Of course he's cross sometimes, but everyone is sometime."

"You are of his blood, that's why you say he's kind," said Marya, simply. She had relaxed and was sitting on on the floor beside Olga. Now that the niece of Serov seemed disposed to be merciful, Marya would exchange information for mercy. "If your uncle knew that one of Stephan's family had even come into his house without being asked, he would have my father beaten and me, too. He'd say it was an insult to have his coachman's children running about the place. And as for stealing! He'd kill us for that!"

"Oh, no!" cried Olga, in horror. "He wouldn't, either. . . . Doesn't Uncle Serov give your father wages?"

"My father has to buy grand clothes to wear when he drives your uncle's carriage, and there's the tax on the land and rent for our house. My mother worked in the fields to earn more, but it made her sick to work so hard in the cold and rain and mud. If your uncle knows

that I have taken money, he'll beat us and turn us out of his lands, too."

"I don't believe you," said Olga, finally. "My uncle isn't so mean."

"Yes, he is. You weren't here when old Ivan, the gardener, got caught taking a flower from the hot-house. His wife loved bright colors and he wanted to give her just the littlest plant with flowers on it. Because he took one, he was beaten, and his wife put to work in the fields, yoked with an ox. She was old and feeble, but when she stumbled, they whipped her until she got up and went on. In two weeks she was dead, and then old Ivan threw himself into the river and died, too." Marya drew herself up on her knees and looked piercingly at Olga. "If you mean to tell your uncle, I shall go out and throw myself in the water now. I'd rather die a million times than see my father beaten and my mother disgraced or hurt."

Now it was Olga who was frightened, though she gave no sign of the cold terror that clutched her heart. Could her uncle be so brutal, and to those who were supposed to be under his protection? Surely life should be more simple. One was hungry, and one could have bread for the asking. But no! Marya had said there was a beating or worse punishment if one asked. Then a resolve grew in Olga's heart.

"How much money did you take?" she asked. Without the bank notes, the whole did not exceed three roubles. "That's all right. Put back the paper money, and take the rest. I've got my allowance and when you go I'll put my money up there and nobody will ever know."

"But won't you take me to see your mother? There'll be time before my uncle comes back." In her child's mind there was a desire to see this new object of interest without thought of verifying Marya's statements. It was characteristic of Olga to accept much on faith, once she thought faith was justified. "We must hurry!" Back on the high-boy went the bank notes but the bit of chain slipped unheeded to the floor, and hand in hand the two girls fled through the doorway.

IV

Meanwhile Michael Serov was riding slowly home through the gathering dusk. He was not in the best temper, and his mood of slow, wordless thought meant danger ahead for the person unfortunate enough to rouse his wrath to the point of expression. Things had gone badly all afternoon. There was the matter of the military highroad, which needed repairs. The district government was going to send a man to superintend the work, and if there was a person harder to keep at peace with the rest of humanity than one of those superintendents, Serov knew from past experience that he had yet to be found. There would be the devil to pay all the rest of the season until frost set in and stopped the work. Then a hailstorm had smashed the glass on some hot-beds and ruined a special crop of lettuce and asparagus, of which Serov was inordinately fond. This business of managing property be damned, anyway. Why couldn't he be free to pick up and go to the south of France if he wanted to?

The master came at last to the lodge gates where he

dismounted and left his horse. He strolled up the path, over the lawn toward the house, went in and directly upstairs to his library.

"Sophia must have come for the child," he mused, when he saw the empty room and the crayons scattered on the table. "But why the devil doesn't she tidy the place? *Mon dieu!* This house! These people! No discipline anywhere!" Running his fingers impatiently through his hair, he stalked into the bedroom; but as he crossed the threshold, there was a faint crunching sound. He looked down and saw beneath his foot a bit of gold chain lying on the carpet.

"What's this doing here?" he exclaimed sharply, stooping to pick it up. "I wonder if that child has been messing with my things." Serov had a bachelor's impatience with the ways of children. "I wish to heaven Soscha would take her away for good. One's duty to a dead sister doesn't last forever. Even Alix might better have her than I." He jerked the tasseled bell-rope in the corner, and when his man appeared, said, "Feodor! Have Sophia bring Mademoiselle Olga to me in twenty minutes."

Stripping off his riding clothes, he refreshed himself with dashes of cool water and got into fresh things quickly. As he stood before the high-boy, tying the cord of his dressing gown, he gave a sudden, searching glance at the top. "I certainly left some coins with that money?" he said, pushing bottles and brushes about. He looked around the room speculatively, remembering the piece of chain. "Somebody started to rob me and got frightened away."

In the library he lit the big lamp, pushed aside the

drawing materials and sat down to read a paper. Time passed and no one came. He waited some ten minutes longer, then flinging down his paper, strode to the bell-rope. Presently Feodor appeared in the doorway. "I thought I told you to have Sophia bring Mademoiselle Olga to me half an hour ago," snarled Serov.

"If you please, sir," answered the man, "Miss Olga just came in a few minutes past and Sophia is cleaning her up. She'll be here directly, sir."

"Just came in, did you say? I didn't give any orders for her to be out. Who's been letting her roam about the place? Somebody's going to pay for this.

"You, Feodor, straighten this mess on the table. Papers and pencils and scribblings all around, as though this was a school-room." Serov stood by the long windows, moodily watching the quiet, efficient Feodor and waiting for something with which he might find fault. At the moment Olga's quaint figure in a fresh white dress stood in the doorway, her hair nicely smoothed and tied with a narrow blue ribbon that terminated in a small bow just above her bang. Serov wondered irrelevantly if he would terrify this youngster with her innocent air of awaiting his pleasure.

"Where have you been, my fine young lady?" he said severely. "Didn't I leave you at home because I didn't want you out of the house to-day? And no sooner have I left than you run off and stay away for hours. Where were you?"

"Please, uncle, I was down near Stephan's cottage. His wife is so sick, and I——"

"Who told you anything about Stephan's wife?" inter-

rupted Serov. "You aren't to have anything to do with the family, no matter what happens to them. Are you a lady, or not, to go trailing around alone over the estate, looking in at coachmen's sick wives? You've been left alone here and you've heard the servants talk, haven't you?" Silence from Olga. "Well, anyway, I want you to come here. I want to ask you something.

"Were you playing in my room or did you see anyone there?"

Olga started guiltily. Here was a dilemma. Without having had time to replace the stolen money she was confronted with this question. Dared she tell Uncle Serov the truth? Could he possibly be brutal enough to do as Marya had said? Olga could not bear to think of that, for the memory of the afternoon in the little log hut of the Georgovitch was too vivid.

A sweet-faced woman, the mother, with the kindest eyes Olga had ever seen, and yet such tired eyes. Marya would not let Olga come into the house, lest it should worry her mother to see the master's niece coming so obviously without permission. Instead she had peered in through a chink in the logs toward the hard, low bed on which lay the gaunt frame of the peasant woman. There it was that Olga saw the light of love denied to her feebly flame in the grey eyes so like Marya's own. Marya gave her mother an orange that Olga had taken from the dining room on their way out.

"Merovka, a great lady passed on the highroad to-day," lied the glib-tongued Marya. "I tried to get out of the way, but she saw me scrambling up the bank and tossed me this orange. Her carriage went on out of

sight, and I brought the orange home to you." Deftly the child was skinning the fruit and pressing out the juice. "You must drink this and get strong. Only don't tell papa about the lady and the orange. He mightn't like to know I had been by the highroad."

Merovka had taken the drink like a tired child. Sighing as she smiled faintly at her little daughter, she lay back on the bed and closed her eyes. Then Marya had stolen outside to where Olga waited. "You heard what I said. To-morrow I'll tell her something else when I give her the good things to eat that I can buy with the money."

"I must go back," said Olga. "But I'll try to come again. If you want any more help, come and tell me."

"Only don't let your uncle know that I was in his house," begged Marya. "Please! For the sake of Merovka and me!"

"I promise," Olga had answered.

While all this flashed through her mind Serov was waiting and watching her face. He took what he saw for ignorance and surprise, however, and turned to Feodor in a rage.

"She doesn't know anything about it, you see, so it must be you, you cur!" He came close to the amazed valet.

"What do you mean by going into my room and taking money and chains and Heaven knows what else? Taking advantage of my kindness to you, eh? Well, I'll soon teach you a lesson. Have you any money in your clothes?" He ran his hands roughly over the valet's clothing, thrusting his hands into the pockets.

"Aha!" he sneered, "here is something! Two gold coins! And a few kopecs beside. What have you done with the rest? Spent already, I'll venture, or given to that wench of yours." He flung the money on the table.

Feodor's serious fine eyes showed resentful gleams. He was known as one of the most respectable young fellows in the neighborhood. Piety and attention to the ceremonies of the church were unusually marked in his behavior, even among people of a race which possessed these attributes in high degree.

"Sir, I haven't taken your money," he began.

"Be quiet, dog!" flared Serov. "Not a word from you!" He stalked out into the corridor and bawled over the gallery railing: "Vassily! Vassily! Come here! Fetch Stephan, and Paul from the garden, and come at once to my room."

Stunned by the speed of proceedings, Olga was trying desperately to find words to help the unfortunate Feodor who, realizing the hopelessness of his situation, spoke swiftly, intensely to the child. He must justify himself before someone, even a mite of a girl.

"I didn't take any money. Those gold coins are my life's savings. They only came from the exchange at Petersburg last week, and I'm keeping them for the fête day of my patron saint." He crossed himself devoutly. "Then they were to go for the poor."

Anguish wrung little Olga's soul. What was this awful consequence of her promise to be silent? What consequences more awful would there be if she told while there was still time?

"I believe you, Feodor," she said softly, tears filling

her eyes and sobs choking her. She went to him and took his big hand in hers. "I wish I could help you," she began, then burst into tears and turned away.

"What do you mean by frightening that child?" roared Serov, returning to the room. "You'll get enough for what you've done, without trying anything more.

"Here! in here!" And stepping aside, he motioned the servants in from the hall.

"Take him out and lock him up in the coach house. We'll soon settle his case."

Shrinking into the recess of a window, Olga watched the three men as they hustled poor Feodor out of the room. Vassily, tall and dignified; Stephan, of massive frame with great, powerful-looking hands for managing the strong horses; and the short, squat Paul, blinking from his close-set eyes at the novel scene in which he had a part. To her horror, it was Stephan who seemed most to relish his work of evicting Feodor. Perhaps it was an expression of the antagonism between servants working in the great house and those employed outside; perhaps it was because Stephan was something of a bully; perhaps he was only giving vent to rebellion denied other outlet. At any rate, he pinched and jostled Feodor, prodding him along with little kicks, and handling him as he never would have permitted one of the horses to be treated. From time to time he cast fawning side-long glances at the master, to note whether his efforts were being approved. Feodor clenched his teeth and made no sound, gave no struggle. Soon the shuffling group was out of the room and down the stair.

Michael Serov turned to Olga, his rage somewhat molli-

fied. "You see what comes of being decent to that sort of people? They only wait for a chance to rob us of the things that are ours by right, just as the throne belongs to the Little Father. This ought to help you understand a great deal. Men like Feodor aren't any better than beasts in the field; they haven't even the breeding of a good horse. You've got to treat them accordingly. If I didn't punish Feodor severely for stealing, then every person who could get into the house through the servants' quarters or any other way would walk off with anything he liked. And the next thing, they would be ordering us about. So you see, one has to be firm."

While he spoke he was conscious of being glad that Soscha need not know the child had witnessed such a brawl. Olga, for her part, still saw the burly Stephan savagely pushing and kicking Feodor. The injustice of it, when of all people Stephan would be most in danger himself if the truth were known. Feodor was to suffer for the wrong-doing of Stephan's own daughter. Olga felt that she must get away from her uncle's presence, so that she could think without danger of saying an incautious, unguarded word; for in spite of everything, she was determined to protect "Merovka," who was somebody's mother.

"May I go to my room?" said Olga, at last.

"Eh?" said Uncle Serov, looking up from the paper he had calmly resumed to read. "Go to your room? Why, yes! Of course! Tell Sophia to give you your tea there to-night. Be a good girl and go to bed early." Olga curtsied and went out with quick little steps.

CHAPTER II

I

DURING the night a barouche bringing her Aunt Soscha and Soscha's son, Günther, a young Austrian just attaining his majority, rolled into the court-yard. The letter announcing their intended visit had been delayed in the post and when Soscha found no one at the train to drive them over from Pskov, a distance of thirty odd miles, she sent a dispatch rider on ahead to prepare Serov for the reception of his guests.

Ignorant of the fact that at the very moment her Aunt Soscha, the head of the family in Olga's opinion, was sleeping beneath the same roof as herself, the child had wakened early to lie gazing at the high ceiling of her bedroom, and through the window that looked toward the coach-house set among the trees. Olga shuddered to think of spending a night alone in that gloomy place; but Feodor had been shut up there. What would they do with him to-day, she wondered. Would she be able to see him? Could she or Marya help him at all? Her meditations were interrupted by the arrival of Sophia with breakfast.

"What's this, awake so early?" she asked, putting down the tray. "You look tired, Fraulein Olga, or excited. Anything the matter?"

"I didn't have very good dreams," answered Olga. "I

don't want to have my face washed." Sophia had gone to the door to bring in the hot-water pitcher.

"Now, now, that's no way to talk! Sit up there and let me wash your face and hands. You mustn't be lazy, especially not to-day."

"What's to-day? Nothing's going to happen today, is there?"

"Hm! I should say there is! Something happened last night."

"Oh! Is it something about Feodor? What is it? Have they taken him away already?"

"Him? I should say not! What do you want to bother about him for? A thief, that's what he is. Held up as a model all the time because he saved his money to give to the church, and all the time he was probably stealing it right and left. That elegant ikon of silver and carved wood his old mother was so proud of was probably bought with stolen money. But you don't want to think about him when you've got better things to think of. Who do you suppose is in this house, this very minute?"

"Fraulein Weinau?" Olga guessed, ducking her head as Sophia washed her ears. "Ouch! Don't dig in so hard! You hurt!"

"Here, here, don't wiggle your head! You've got to be all clean to-day, I tell you. . . . No, it isn't Fraulein Weinau. You'll never have her again, I think. Can't you guess who it is any better than that? My goodness, I'd be ashamed!"

Olga looked intently at the maid. No, it couldn't be—but there was Sophia so smug and important. "I know

who it is! Its my Aunt Soscha, isn't it? When did she come? I want to see her right away. I want to see her. I wonder if she brought me something from Vienna."

"Fraulein Olga! Don't be vulgar! Talking about presents the first thing. I tell you you can't see her until you're cleaned up. You've got to eat your breakfast first."

"I won't, either! I'm going to go and get in bed with her. I want to see my Aunt Soscha." Sophia could not understand how welcome this haven of Soscha's presence seemed to the little girl, haunted by Feodor's misfortune. Never before in her life had she wanted so much to be petted and caressed.

"You *shall* see her, liebchen," came a voice from the doorway, and there stood the radiant creature who was Aunt Soscha. "No, no! You mustn't get out of bed. You'd catch cold." Sophia stepped aside and Soscha was beside the bed leaning down to kiss Olga, who flung her arms about her aunt's neck. There was nobody in the world so beautiful as Aunt Soscha, she thought. No one who had such blue eyes, such white skin, nor such hair, like the finest little wiry threads of red-gold. Sophia's eyes, too, were wide with admiration. Here was a woman she would like to serve. Even at middle age, there remained more than a suggestion of the delicate grace which must have been her's as a girl. About her hovered an air of reserve and formality, a certain sense of keeping aloof; but this was a quality of the mind too subtle for Olga or her maid to recognize, and only as the child grew older did she come to regard it as one of the keys to the secret

of her aunt's nature. For Soscha was a creature of courts, to whom the performance of a prescribed action at the prescribed time was more than the breath of life. She had been an intimate of the late Empress Elisabeth of Austria and had become a member of her favorite daughter's suite not many months after the assassin's dagger had taken Elisabeth's life that summer day of 1898 in Geneva. It had been one of the many curious contradictions of Elisabeth's life that she should have chosen for a companion in her determined attempts to flee from the rigors of court rule a woman like the Countess Hohenwald, who delighted in observing every form of etiquette. Nevertheless sincere devotion and sympathy on Soscha's part had been recognized by the Empress, who had all too little of that sort of thing in her life; and more than once Soscha had accompanied her far afield, or had as willingly arisen early in the morning when they were in Vienna to mount a horse and go riding with her through drenching rain along the slippery mountain roads. But there was no doubting that Elisabeth had been grateful for this unfaltering readiness to risk accident or death in her service and in obedience to her whims. Tenacity and single-mindedness of purpose were Soscha's fundamental characteristics.

Suddenly Olga said to her, "Aunt Soscha! Do you know that there is a man shut up in the coach house?"

"No?" Soscha replied, thinking to humor the child. "What is that for?"

"I beg your pardon, Madame," interrupted Sophia, "Feodor, the master's valet, stole some money from him."

They found it out last night, so he's been kept in the coach house until they decide what to do with him. Fraulein Olga's been talking about it ever since it happened."

"I know, but what will they do to him?" asked Olga. "Won't the priest save him? Feodor's a good man."

"There, there! This isn't nice for little girls to think about," said Soscha. "We mustn't talk of it any more. Let Sophia help you dress and then we'll go to see your Cousin Günther. He'll be surprised to find his cousin almost a young lady." While Olga was being dressed, Soscha went quietly about the room, looking into wardrobes and drawers, to Sophia's extreme discomfort. Presently she spoke to the maid. "Do you think Fraulein Olga's clothes can be made ready within a few days? I wish you would come back here in an hour, to talk to me about her things."

"Very good, Madame," answered Sophia, her mind in a turmoil. Was Fraulein Olga going away for good? Would there be any chance for her to go, too? The possibility seemed almost too splendid to be true, even to Sophia's highly romantic mind.

Presently Olga was ready and had gone down stairs with her aunt. They found Günther and Michael lounging under the trees where some tables and chairs indicated that tea was served.

"So this is the little cousin?" said Günther, genially. Olga thought Günther a very handsome young man, with eyes like his mother's, and not so stern-looking a face as Uncle Serov's. It made one feel quite important, having grown-up men get up to hand one a chair. "What do you do with yourself all day?" asked her cousin.

"She's got a new pony that you ought to see," interrupted Serov. "Rangy little Cossack horse from the plains."

"Her name's Tarenka," said Olga.

"'Tarenka', what a pretty name?" said Soscha.

"Yes, Tarenka means 'female tyrant.' Appropriate for a Cossack horse. But thank the Lord she doesn't live up to it. Gentle as a lamb," Michael answered.

"Michael, tell me, does Olga ride well?"

"Yes, she has a pretty fair seat and she's got a certain amount of natural form, but I couldn't promise you how she'd look on the Prater. A few lessons with a good master though, and she'll be all right."

Olga was in terror lest someone suggest that they visit the stables, which were right next to the coach house, and she couldn't bear the thought of laughing and chattering where Feodor might overhear, and Stephan would be there, too. Noticing her silence Soscha looked at her keenly. "Where are the stables, Michael? What direction?"

He waved his hand in a vague semi-circle. "Over north-east. You can just get a glimpse of the trees around the coach house, and the stables are beyond that."

"Maybe Cousin Günther would like to see the rowboat," offered Olga, in desperation. "The brook is almost as wide as a river in one place and we ride on it."

"You take him wherever you think it would be interesting," said Soscha, finally. "You know all about the place here, so we'll let you use your own judgment. Perhaps we'll all go riding after luncheon, and we can see the horses then."

When they had strolled off across the lawn, Soscha turned to Michael. "What is this affair about a thieving servant of yours? And what has it to do with Olga? It was almost the first thing she spoke of when I saw her this morning."

"Why, she happened to be in my library yesterday afternoon when I caught this fellow with some gold coins in his pockets. He'd been disturbed in the act of going through my things. I know it was he, because nobody excepting Olga had been in the room all day, so we put him in the coach house over night. The starosta from the nearest village is coming over to talk to me this afternoon and we'll fix the trial. Will you smoke?" He offered her his cigarette case.

"No, thank you! It's not the thing in the Archduchess Valerie's household for her women to smoke and I've gotten all out of the habit. Not that we're prudes in Vienna. You'd never think it if you could see Eugenie Kolnitz's salon of an evening, with women in the best Viennese society puffing great cigars.

"But about this Feodor, or whatever his name is," pursued Soscha. "The very fact that he is in the coach house was what made Olga willing to do anything rather than have us go to the stables. I was watching her because she was so obviously distressed that I knew something was wrong."

"I'm sure I don't know how there could be. But she's such an emotional little piece, impetuous and impulsive as the deuce. She's a handful."

"A handful you'd like to let go of, Michael?" smiled Soscha, drawing a silver chain through her fingers.

"Would I? I've got a plan all ready to pour into the ear of the first person ready to listen." Soscha smiled encouragingly, and he continued. "If I wouldn't have Olga to think about every summer, I'd sell this whole estate and divide the money three ways,—for Alix, Olga, and myself. Then I'd take the first train for the south of France and be content to end my days there."

"Well! You do know pretty much what you want! But is there any good chance of selling the property without losing money? Not everyone is looking these days for enormous Russian holdings."

"That's just it! I've got an American now with an idea of making this into a sugar beet country. He'd give a fine price on it. With the return from the sale of this land and the securities we have for her from poor Marie, that child ought to be worth about \$500,000 in her own name. Quite a *dot* for a youngster her age."

"You have looked after her finances and I'll make a good match for her at court. That's what I've always intended, and that's why I came up here now. I want to take her back to Vienna with me and relieve you of your responsibility. You're quite sure your offer for this property is sound?"

"None better! Just to show you how badly the American wants this, he's bought an option on the land just east of ours—trying to force me into making him a lower price. I did that once with a horse, the season I spent with Alix in England."

"The matter's quite simple then. You are willing for me to take Olga and the maid Sophia back with me now?"

That reminds me, I've got to go and talk to her about Olga's clothes."

"Take 'em both. Take anything or anybody you want, so long as you take 'em. Blessings on you."

Two days later Olga was permitted to go for a farewell ride on Tarenka. She planned to look for Marya in the village, for she knew nothing of what had happened to Feodor. Aunt Soscha wouldn't let her talk about him, and from the conversation of her elders she could glean only the most meager information. Feodor was not in the coach house any more, she knew that; but where had he gone? Was he dead, or in prison? One afternoon Uncle Serov had ridden away to the village and when he came back, he talked mysteriously to Aunt Soscha for a few moments. "That's quite right," Aunt Soscha had said. However, the farewell ride on Tarenka was spoiled for Olga because Aunt Soscha and a groom from the stables went along. Soscha could not understand why Olga should suddenly lose enthusiasm.

II

The next morning a small figure might have been seen scrambling up the trunk of a pine tree which lifted its branches past the windows of the northeast corner of the house. On a level with the sill, the young climber peered in where Olga's sleeping figure seemed only a tiny island in a sea of bedclothes, with a canopy of heavy curtains.

Then the heavy branch of the tree rubbed back and forth across the glass. Needles and twigs scratched and rasped in a grating monotone that at last awakened the child, who sat upright, rubbing her eyes. As the noise

ceased, a white face appeared at the window. Olga gave a little gasp of astonishment, but recognizing her visitor slipped out of bed and went to the window. By dint of tugging and pushing, she loosened the catch so that the big panes, stiff in their frames, opened outward, inch by inch. Then Marya climbed up a foot or more beyond the window and swung down by a heavy branch toward the opening. She pawed about to get a footing on the sill, and feeling her feet firmly grounded at last, let go of the branch and jumped into the room.

"*Nichevo*, all is well!" she assured Olga, after a hasty glance through the window. She swung it shut and came toward the center of the room where Olga was shivering with excitement and hugging herself. "Get back into bed and I'll tell you why I came." She sat on the floor beside the bed.

"Get up here beside me," commanded Olga. "It'll be better."

"Uh, uh! No! I might get caught, and my feet are too dirty to put on the beautiful covers." Marya smoothed the quilted satin hesitatingly. "If anyone comes now, I can do this." She clasped arms around her knees, and with one quick motion rolled from sight under the bed.

— Olga laughed and leaned over the edge. "That's funny. But come out and tell me why you came here."

"They've taken Feodor away to prison at Pskov," she announced, tersely. "Father told my mother night before last, but I couldn't get away to tell you. I was hiding in the copse when you rode by yesterday. A grand lady was with you and you didn't stop."

"That was my Aunt Soscha. She's going to take me to Vienna for good. This afternoon we're going. I was afraid I wouldn't see you again. Is your mother all right?"

"And what about Feodor? Is he really in a prison? When did he go?"

"The master had the starosta be judge but he said just what he had been told to say. That was how my father could be a witness."

"What could your father say?" Olga drew her knees up and sat hugging them.

"He laughed in my mother's face the other night and boasted about what a man he was. He had told a fine story for the starosta to hear. He said he had found the master struggling with that wretch, Feodor. The tables and chairs were knocked over and there had been a bad fight. He said he hit Feodor and got the stolen money away from him."

"Oh, Marya! That was a lie!" exclaimed Olga, tensely. "There wasn't any fight at all. Feodor was as gentle as could be. But what else did your father say?"

"The starosta seemed awfully afraid, my father said. He gave the sentence in a weak little voice. Feodor got sent to the prison for fifteen years."

"Isn't that dreadful?" whispered Olga. "I wish we could do something. Where is Feodor's mother?"

"She was at the trial and cried, 'My son! Save my son! He didn't steal!' But the starosta frowned and said to put her out because she disturbed them. My father laughed when he told how they pushed and jostled her from the room. She didn't even say good-bye to

Feodor when they took him away. He cried, 'Mother! Mother!' like that, when they pushed her out; but he got shoved back on the bench."

The two children stared at each other, solemn-eyed.

"I'll give you some things," said Olga, finally. "You must help Feodor's mother, too. I'll never forget him as long as I live, but I can't very well help him when I'm going away. If you stay here, we ought to have a sign between us, so that if you ever need help from me, or if I want to give you a message we'll know by the sign."

Marya looked at the soft brown hair, with its tints of coppery gold, tumbling about Olga's face. "I can plait hair into rings," she ventured.

"Can you?" answered Olga in delight. "Get those scissors on my tray, and cut a piece of my hair and a piece of yours. You make two rings, and wear the one made out of my hair and I'll wear yours. Then if I ever send my ring to you, you'll know that what comes with it is really and truly from me; and if you ever want anything, send your ring with the message and I'll know it's true."

Olga bent her head while Marya cut, with fingers trembling from excitement, a thick strand of the shining hair. Then she loosened the dun-colored braid that swung to her waist and bent her head for Olga to cut a chunk out of its coarser lengths. Just as Marya raised her head, there was a sound of footsteps in the corridor.

"Quick, you must hide," said Olga. "That's Sophia with my breakfast."

"Give me all that hair and the scissors," whispered Marya. "I'll make the rings before I go." She rolled

from sight under the bed just as the door opened.

When Sophia entered, expecting to waken the child, it took her experienced eye but a few minutes to note that something untoward had occurred in the room. In the bed Olga was making a valiant attempt to feign sleep, but the rumpled bed-clothes and her general air of consciousness, charging the atmosphere, told a story of restlessness or disturbance.

"Come, come," Sophia said, "what has been going on here? Fraulein Olga, what's the matter? You aren't asleep. What has happened?"

Olga's tousled head came up from the pillow with such a haggard expression in the bright eyes and such a flush of color on her cheeks that Sophia knew her suspicions were reasonable.

"Did you have another bad dream, you poor child?" she said soothingly, coming to feel the smooth young forehead for a touch of fever. Finding none, she gazed at Olga perplexedly. "Do you want to stay in bed for a while?"

"No, I want to get right up and get dressed," exclaimed Olga, thrusting her bare feet out of bed. "What have you got for my breakfast? I'm hungry."

"Nice porridge with cream, and some bread, and a cup of milk. But you must eat your breakfast there in bed."

"I want some fruit to eat," said the child, petulantly. "Go and get me an orange. I want an orange."

"Why, Fraulein Olga! How you talk! You're so cross this morning. You must be good and sweet, for Madame Soscha wants to see you just as soon as you're dressed."

"Well! I'll get dressed some time if you'll go away and get me an orange. I want you to go away."

"Now look here," said Sophia sternly. "You're in a temper. Where are your manners, I'd like to know? What would happen to you in Vienna if you talked like this?"

To Sophia's consternation, Olga threw herself violently back on the bed and began to cry softly as though she were hurt, not with the noisy outbursts that come from temper. Hearing the piteous sobs, Sophia was at her wits' end. Here was no illness that she could discover, and no nastiness of disposition. She patted the bowed head and smoothed the silky hair until at last the sobbing ceased.

"There, there, little white dove, be quiet! I will tuck you in here in the big bed again and go get you an orange the way you like it best. A fresh one peeled, with sweet honey sauce poured over it and crisp little pieces of sugared peel on top, the thin pieces of sweetmeat cook keeps for company tea. How would you like that?"

Olga lay submissively on the pillow, and presently Sophia left the bedside and went about the room on one pretext or another. Olga's eyes closed and she seemed to sleep.

But when Sophia had tiptoed from the room, Olga sat up. For a time she waited to be sure that her nurse would not return, then she slipped quickly out of bed and stooped to call under the flouncings, "Come out, now, at once."

Marya's head was thrust out for a cautious survey before she scrambled blinking into the light. Olga took her hand and drew her to the small table across the room.

"Here! You hurry and eat this porridge!" she said imperiously. "Put the bread in your pocket for your mother. Eat while I get something for you."

Nothing loathe to warm her famished stomach with porridge and cream, Marya slid into the chair and began to eat. The savour of the food tickled her nostrils and she forgot all else in the satisfaction of her hunger. Meanwhile Olga had been burrowing industriously into the bottom of a drawer in the big wardrobe, and returned presently with a little purse.

"Here," she said, thrusting it into Marya's pocket, "that's the money I was given last fête day. I've been saving it, but you must see that Feodor's mother gets it. You had the other money, so you give this to her." Like an obedient animal Marya made no protest, and between spoonfuls of porridge only felt in her pocket to make certain that both bread and the purse were there. Olga was back at the wardrobe, hauling out some thick dresses.

"You must take these, too," she gasped. "My aunt says I'm not to wear these clothes because they're not stylish enough for Vienna; but they'll be good for you. Tell your mother you found them on the highroad. I wish I had something for her, too."

Olga straightened abruptly and went to the bureau, where she picked up a carved wooden box. Fumbling in her haste and nervousness, at last she pressed an invisible spring which released the cover, and peering in, drew forth two heavy silver images, a massive silver ring, and some fine gold chains.

"Didn't you say that there was a man in the village, Rindskoff, who would buy things from you? You'll be safe if you take these to him. Only save one of the silver images for your mother. Tell her who sent it, and keep it a secret between you two."

Marya drew the back of her hand across her mouth in token that the last bit of porridge and the last drop of milk had disappeared and that she was free to devote her attention to other affairs.

"While I was under the bed I plaited the rings," she said. "Here's yours. Does it fit?"

"Oh! I didn't think you could work under there? I'd have been scared, with Sophia in the room."

"I was afraid, but I wanted to get them done." Marya slipped the little circlet of braided hair over Olga's finger. On her own grimy hand a band gleamed with its streaks of copper color.

"Now we will swear never to forget Feodor," said Olga. "Put your other hand on my ring and I'll put mine on yours while we say a solemn oath.

"In the name of God and Our Lady, I promise to remember and help Feodor!" Slowly after Olga, Marya repeated the words. "*Bog Zneat*, God knows."

"You must go before Sophia comes back. Put the little things in your pocket and I'll throw the clothes out to you. Hurry!"

"My pocket won't hold all the silver and the purse, too. I'll put the things in my kerchief." She unfastened the shabby neckcloth that served also as a shawl. Of the bread, purse, and jewelry she made a bundle and slung it over her arm. The two children were grave with the importance of the moment.

"I shall never forget you," said Olga, earnestly. "If I never see you any more I hope you won't forget me. And I hope you'll always be very good to your mother."

Almost Marya could match her for dignity, but Olga's

serious face overawed her and she began to snivel. Falling on her knees, she kissed the hem of the long, white nightgown that wrapped itself about Olga's feet.

"Hurry, Marya! You must go," said Olga; bending down to her.

Once on the window sill, Marya took the bundle in her teeth and choosing a strong branch a foot below the window, jumped for the big tree, where she landed safely with a prodigious swishing of needles and swaying of small branches. She scrambled down the trunk, while Olga tossed out the dresses, tightly rolled together. As long as Marya was in sight Olga stood at the window, but at last she pulled the long panes together and turned toward the table. Footsteps resounded along the corridor and she had only time to slide into the chair and pick up the empty cup when Sophia appeared.

"Couldn't you stay in bed?" she demanded gently. "You shouldn't have been sitting here without any more clothes on than your nightdress. Your skin is cold." She felt the child's cheek. "But you've eaten all the porridge and that will make you warm. I'm glad you've eaten so much of it. And here's the nice orange for a treat."

"Thank you, Sophia."

The maid, watching Olga begin to eat the orange with apparent appetite, wondered how the child could be so hungry after having had her porridge.

"It feels as cool in here," she thought, "as though the window had been open."

CHAPTER III

I

At the age of fourteen Olga was given over for spiritual, mental and bodily guidance into the hands of the Dominican Sisters, whose convent was a part of the great "Dominikaner" square of buildings not far from the eastern segment of the Ringstrasse,—Stubenring,—in Vienna. Imperial patronage had made the Kloster a beautiful little Eternal City in miniature, sufficient unto itself. The number of pupils was limited so that the quadrangles and gardens offered plenty of space for daily exercise. Occasionally the girls were taken through the more quiet streets to visit the parks about the Hofburg, or to walk sedately through the galleries of the Imperial Museum; and there were delicious intervals when a relative would drive over to take one shopping in the Kartnerstrasse and the Graben, or riding along the Prater at the fashionable hour, or to watch a ceremony at court. For the gentle sisters with their professed object of "teaching the children of the upper classes" were not to forget entirely that their young charges would some day belong to the world and to the court circle. Olga was intensely excited over her introduction into this new life. It was altogether unlike the school in Berlin, for underneath the routine and discipline of the convent, soothing and restraining the susceptible and ardent young beings within its walls, there was that

occasional prophetic glimpse of Life with a large L, to make the school period seem only one of probation. In Berlin one had always that overpowering sense of The State, which meant the Emperor; even little girls in school existed only for The State. But the Austrians were very naïve in their complete absorption of the joys of living, to which a woman was tacitly admitted on a basis of equal privilege. In Austria, as elsewhere, there was power in a woman when there was charm or wit; and happily most of the women, particularly in the court circle, were exceedingly charming and witty. So Olga entered the Kloster with young and tender descendants of the Coburgs, Windishgraetz, Lichtensteins, Auerspergs, and other well known Austrian families. Against an equipment gathered through centuries of assured rule, she had her child's supreme innocence and the memory of a great wrong for which she had in part been responsible.

She was naturally a devout child and the contemplative phase of the Sisters' life made an impression upon her. She loved the preparations for divine services, for special days observed by the Dominican order. The girls were each given little cell-like rooms of their own, and Olga soon obtained permission to fashion a sort of altar in one corner of her domain. There was a candle and her prayer-book, a reliquary that had been her mother's, a rosary of curiously shaped silver beads, and an image of the Christ Child of Prague, that quaint Slavonic madonna-figure. Had Olga been a prioress or an abbess of old, she could scarcely have guarded sacred vessels with more zealous care. And having the altar, she developed little rituals of her own, including a special prayer for Feodor. Away

from Russia, never seeing Marya any more, her thoughts could not help but be drawn toward her new life; yet there remained memory to bring back vivid pictures, and the words of her vow that she would not forget Feodor.

"Mother of Jesus," she would pray, kneeling before the silver image after the silent hours of night had scattered the little community to individual meditation. "Mother of Jesus, hear me for the sake of Thy Son! Intercede with Thy Son for the sake of another mother whose son suffers without guilt!

"Holy Mother! Go to Feodor in the prison and comfort him. Comfort his mother, too. Help him to be patient! Help him to be free! I will pray for him always, and say a special prayer on his fête day, for his mother's sake. It was our fault, my family's fault, and I must help him." Solemnly completing her devotions with the sign of the cross, she would rise from her knees and climb into bed.

With this somewhat dramatic ending, each day of the school year slipped by uneventfully. Gradually Olga was becoming familiar with the expressions of Austrian life, becoming better acquainted with her fellow-scholars in the convent. Did young Wolfgang von Lichtenstein fall from his bicycle while riding in the Prater and injure his knee, Olga had the news in confidence from Emelie, Wolfgang's cousin, and one of her pew-mates in chapel. Did Maria Schwarzenberg's older sister begin a new "affair" with a young man in the Italian embassy, of all places, Olga knew just what the family had said about the matter during Maria's last brief visit at home. So Olga learned to tell a vivid story in her turn. Aunt Soscha's position in the

Archduchess Valerie's suite furnished many a bit of news which would have scandalized the Sisters, had they dreamed that one of their charges was repeating *sub rosa* the latest advances of the Count Lonyay, the Crown Princess Stephanie's lover, scarcely comprehending the import of the words she said.

Thus was one prepared for life!

II

Olga had acquired at least one enemy among the girls, black-eyed Theresa Haugwitz, representative of that family which has its kinsman, Haugwitz, the jurist, immortalized as a figure in the composition of the Maria Theresa monument which gives a name to the platz opposite the Burgtor. It was one of those antagonisms which nature creates and establishes but does not explain; and its foundation was doubtless in the contrast between Olga's bright, sparkling good looks and Theresa's less attractive swarthinness. Nor had Theresa the financial inheritance which would be Olga's. Altogether there were plenty of reasons for breeding discontent in a jealous mind. Olga was more or less unconscious of Theresa's attitude, although she had a vague feeling that she was not a favorite with the other girl; and meanwhile Theresa bided her time.

One afternoon, taking a somewhat sacrilegious "short cut" to the quadrangle through the dim and deserted chapel, Theresa saw a freshly lighted candle flickering before a tiny shrine at the extreme right of the nave. Spring sunshine filtering through the windows in that moment enabled her to discern a figure kneeling at the shrine. A familiar and detested figure—the little Russian, von

Kranz! For it was Feodor's fête day and true to her vow, Olga was saying a prayer for him.

Theresa went quietly and cautiously from pillar to pillar, drawing always nearer to the kneeling suppliant. She had no scruples about this sort of thing, and as she listened words came gradually to her through the silence. So much was Olga putting into her petition that Theresa, her keen mind hate-sharpened, began to see a complete story and not a little mystery spreading out before her. "Thou knowest it was my fault," "Go to Feodor in the prison" and similar phrases purred sweetly in her ears. Here was a weapon ready to her hand! Without waiting to hear more, Theresa slipped noiselessly away and out into the quadrangle, where she lost little time in gathering about her a faithful few whom she knew would readily turn against Olga if given sufficient motive.

In a sunny corner a half dozen girls sat grouped as though busy with their lessons, their heads bent over a book. But in reality they were listening eagerly to Theresa's whispered news.

"I've just heard the most *awful* thing about Olga von Kranz," she had said abruptly. "She's got most of her family in prison all because of something she did to send them there. She's in the chapel all alone now, praying before a new candle she's lighted. Probably praying to save the souls of her family."

"Are you sure?" asked a slender girl whose pale face was framed in a marvelous aura of auburn curls. "Did you really hear her praying?"

"Of course I did. I was coming through the chapel myself and I couldn't help but hear her. It was so quiet.

She said something about somebody named Feodor who is in prison and about how it was all her fault. Why, she may be dangerous to the Empire! She may be a Russian spy, and that 'Feodor' may have been put in prison for a political offense. I've almost a mind to tell my uncle, the advocate, so they can watch Olga and her aunt more closely. It's positively dangerous."

"Well, I'm certainly not going to have anything to do with a Russian spy," said Louise Erzthaler, the pale, auburn-haired one. "You know how the Emperor hates and fears the Russians."

"We ought to form a society, or something," said Theresa, "and make it our business to watch what she does, so if we suspect anything we can report it at home."

"Yes! Yes!" chorused the girls. "It would be *too* exciting for worlds to have a secret society. Let's form it now, just ourselves!"

"What shall we call it?" asked Marcellene Sternau, a silly little thing who giggled at the proposed plan and seemed to regard it as highly amusing. And the half-dozen heads bent even closer together to discuss their delectable scheme.

Within two weeks the most alarming and exciting rumors imaginable had spread among the girls. Olga von Kranz's brother had been imprisoned for killing an Austrian in Russia who had been disloyal to the government of the Czar. Olga had been sent to Vienna to grow up there and spy on the Austrians that she might revenge her family. "Feodor" was the name of the brother, and there was also a girl named "Marya," the sister of the dead Austrian, in love with Feodor, and therefore disloyal

to Austria. Quite a tangle, and a dangerous one! Olga heard little or nothing of this. She only knew that a great many of the girls no longer seemed to want her with them during recreation periods; that they gathered in groups by themselves and watched her furtively, and that they had a mysterious topic for discussion of which she knew nothing. At last, after a fortnight, Emelie von Lichtenstein came with news. Emelie was somewhat older than Olga, and when this definite crisis arose, at once assumed the rôle of her outspoken champion.

"Oh, Emelie! Would you believe *me* if I told you a story? Told you the truth about all this?"

"Of course I'd believe you."

As Olga leaned forward, a tense, earnest figure in her dark convent clothes, her eyes shining with purpose, Emelie remembered a day when she had stood beside a monument in the Alps where was marked the path of those little martyrs of the "Children's Crusade"; from the light in Olga's eyes, she might have been one of those same trusting, inspired youths who had found a cause.

On an impulse Emelie put both arms around the younger girl and drew her close. "*Liebchen, armes liebchen,*" she murmured. "It *was* dreadful, wasn't it? I'm going to tell some of the girls, Meran Pöstling, and one or two others, that I know the real truth. They'll trust me and believe in you. So you'll have somebody to protect you and take your part."

III

About this same time, Soscha Hohenwald discovered that a certain amount of current gossip was being

directed toward her. A surprising number of people had suddenly become definitely interested in asking after the welfare of her young niece, who was "born in Russia, wasn't she?" Soscha said nothing, but thought a great deal; she had no one to whom she might safely go for information, and it was significant that the Countess Dericote, who might have helped her, a gentle brown wraith who had her own place about the court despite the fact that she was known to be a Russian by birth, had left Vienna for the Tyrol, though the summer season had not yet begun. But one sunshiny morning when the trees were green with tender, new leaves, Soscha met the Princess Julie Auersperg in a florist shop on the Ringstrasse. Julie and she were very good friends, valuing each other's regard, nevertheless speaking their minds on all matters with almost masculine frankness. Julie had been home from Paris only a week, and this was their first meeting, while she was intent on the choice of an enormous bunch of fragrant violets. It had not been quite good form to select these flowers for a long time after the death of the Crown Prince Rudolph, whose ill-fated companion in death had gone directly from the purchase of a corsage of violets in this very shop to the fatal rendezvous at Meyerling.

"Do you still want to wear those dreadful flowers?" inquired Soscha. "Leblanc has no delicacy, it seems to me, to sell them."

"My dear Soscha," answered Julie gayly, "why make the whole world of violet-lovers in Vienna suffer because of a mere coincidence? Besides, that's in the past anyway. Poor Rudi's mother can't be hurt now by idle gossip nor

even by the sight of these innocent little flowers." She stopped speaking, and looked speculatively at Soscha. "Idle gossip," she repeated. "Hm! I wonder!"

"You wonder what?" said Soscha. "Have you heard anything? For heaven's sake, don't you ask me how Olga is."

"Oh! You have an idea," replied Julie. "Hm! Have you time to come for a little drive with me?"

Julie's brougham rolled smoothly out the Kartnerstrasse and the Rotenturm, toward the general direction of the Prater, while the Princess lost no time in putting the rumors before the astonished Soscha. It was the same story,—of this relative of Olga's in prison, of suspicion pointing toward Olga as a Russian spy,—just as it had been told by the girls in the convent. But there were elaborations and theories, developed by older members of families in which the story had circulation.

"I really think it's time to step in and settle this," concluded Julie. "You know how high feeling may run in just a little while. And the Emperor has no sympathy for the Russians, to put it mildly." Soscha regarded her with blue eyes pale and cold as a winter sky, her lips set in a hard line.

"It's perfectly ridiculous," she burst out. "You said the name of this 'relative' was Feodor? I can see how the story started, but it's preposterous, really. You're quite right. It's time for me to step in, if it isn't too late." Soscha was a person to act quickly. "Will you come with me to the convent now?" she asked. "I'm going to take Olga out of there."

The Sisters were in a gentle flutter of alarm at this

unexpected visit from the court ladies, and the determination in Soscha's eyes meant that her errand was not pleasure. She plunged at once into an interview with the Mother Superior, and found that good lady utterly ignorant of disturbance within the walls.

"Your niece is a good child," she said gently. "A trifle exuberant in her spirit sometimes, but very devout. She has a little altar in her room and not many weeks ago she asked permission to burn a candle for a poor man, a friend of your family, I believe she said." Soscha sent a triumphant glance toward Julie!

"Could we be permitted to visit Olga's room?" she inquired. "I should like to see the altar."

"The little girls are having an embroidery lesson. We need not disturb them, if you will come with me."

It was true, that part of the story then, Soscha found, looking at the makeshift shrine. Was Olga going to be a religious fanatic? she asked herself. Just when Soscha could give her advantages, and with her money? Anger, fear and determination filled her mind, and she could not fathom the loyalty, tenderness and kindly spirit which the sight of the rosary and the madonna brought to Julie Auersperg, whose eyes filled with sympathetic tears.

They returned through the quiet stone corridors to the Mother Superior's office. "May I speak to Olga now?" asked Soscha. The demand in her cold blue eyes brooked no refusal, and presently Olga entered the room, curtsying respectfully, mindful of her manners. In her dark dress she looked curiously subdued, and beneath her eyes were faint, purplish shadows. Soscha frowned involuntarily, and Julie longed to put her arms about the girl.

The older women sat down and motioned Olga to a chair, straight-backed and stiff like all the others in the room.

"I understand you've been getting yourself into trouble," said Soscha, abruptly. "What have you done, that I should have heard rumors of it before I have the truth from you?"

"It was nothing, Aunt Soscha," faltered Olga. "Only I have prayed at a little altar in my room, and on Feodor's fête day I had permission to burn a candle for him. Emelie von Lichtenstein knows that Feodor isn't really a relative."

Soscha almost snorted with rage; so far as it was possible for a person of her polite instincts, she was on the verge of giving way completely to her fury.

Olga looked at the three women. Only Julie Auersperg was regarding her with a degree of compassion. The Mother Superior's face, ordinarily so placid, was unduly distressed; that this unfortunate affair should have occurred in her convent, she thought, as she endeavored to understand the situation. Aunt Soscha, of course, was furious. The time had come to tell. Uncle Michael was in his beloved France, the estate was no longer under the family's control; it would not hurt Marya nor Feodor's mother if she told.

So the story came out, bit by bit, while the three looked on aghast. As they heard of the adventure with Marya, and of Feodor's innocence, of the peasants' fear of Michael and the determination to save Marya's mother from punishment, they looked at the child with mingled emotions. Olga finished her story and sat slumped in her chair; after months of repression it had taken all her

strength to make this plea for justification. Had she looked up she might have seen the Mother Superior wiping away a furtive tear, while Julie Auersperg's gray eyes gleamed with tenderness. Even Soscha was affected by the revelation, though her sensibilities were roused at the hint of association with peasantry. There were still lessons for Olga to learn, the impulses of her heart must be curbed. But Julie could no longer endure the sight of this brave child, un comforted and having no word of commendation.

"Come over here, dear," she said, at last, and looking reproachfully at Soscha, drew Olga to a little footstool beside her. "It was hard for you to know the right thing, but I think you were wise and good. Perhaps your prayers will be answered, as they deserve to be."

"Mother," said Soscha, "may I take the child away with me? We three will not repeat this story, even to justify Olga's position, but I can't let her stay here."

"I should make an exception to almost any rule in her case," replied the nun.

So it was speedily arranged that Olga should go with her aunt to live in the palace, where by reason of a normal life under Soscha's influence the odious rumors would be dissipated, and the whole affair forgotten.

CHAPTER IV

I

If Olga von Kranz had been less independent by nature, her development during the next four years would have been more to the liking of her Aunt Soscha. That good lady, steeped in the atmosphere of the court, made a fetish of form and it caused her great sorrow to find that her niece was not inclined to bow down and worship where she directed. Ever since Olga had come to live with her aunt, and had at first been given some duty with the Countess Trautenau, Mistress of the Robes, she had shown too little regard for the time-hallowed etiquette so essential to such women as the Countess and her aunt. For instance, she had been just like the townspeople in her attraction for the *Wachtparade*, the changing of the guard in the Franzensplatz every noon. Frequently she loitered at the window, listening to the band, when she should have been getting ready for luncheon.

"My dear child," Soscha would say in patient exasperation, "can't you remember that you are of the court now? That you will be invited to the big military reviews? It isn't so important for you to be a witness every time the guard is relieved!"

"But Aunt Soscha, it's so interesting!" Olga would reply. "The soldiers are so stiff and straight in their

splendid uniforms. The people are so proud of them, and they love to hear the band."

"That makes no difference. It isn't your place to pay the slightest attention. Please be good enough to remember that the next time."

"I'll try not even to hear the music," promised Olga. "I'm sorry if I've displeased you. Truly I am." But the next week, Olga might be found at a corridor window, half-concealed by the heavy curtains, listening to the music and watching the soldiers.

Thus it was that one warm June day Countess Dericote saw the girl as she was going along the hallway. The soft breeze through the open window stirred Olga's brown hair as she leaned slightly over the sill to look down on the platz, three stories below. The lady stopped short, stood undecided, made as if to go back, but stopped again and looked at Olga. Presently the girl became conscious that someone was watching her, and turning saw the Countess. In a flash she remembered Aunt Soscha's warning about the *Wachtparade*. Now she was in for a scolding from Countess Dericote, who would probably tell her aunt. Olga, determined to be polite at least, essayed a curtsy.

"There, there, child! Let us dispense with bowing, thou and I, when we are both come to look at the soldiers," said the lady, drawing closer to the window.

"Oh, does Madame come to watch the guard, too?" asked Olga in delight. "Madam my aunt disapproves of my doing it, but sometimes I can't help looking out when I hear the music."

"Ah, yes! Madame your aunt! Well, she is an older

woman than I, and no doubt knows what is best for young things like yourself just coming on in the world. She knows the court." Olga moved aside to make room for the Countess at the window. "It is a pretty picture, the people and the soldiers down there, nicht wahr?"

"Yes! They are so interesting, the people."

"You have a sympathy for them, then?" the Countess looked quizzically at her.

"Everyone of them is as human as I am myself," the girl answered. "It doesn't always seem right to me that some of them should be less considered than the others. . . . But it isn't treason to talk like this." Countess Dericote made an involuntary gesture of reaching out to touch Olga's arm, withdrawing her hand again almost as quick as thought. She smiled in her own slow fashion, which Olga thought the sweetest and yet the saddest she had ever seen.

"No, I don't believe it is treason, though I should be careful to whom I spoke as you have."

"I speak too hastily, I know. But I have thought a great deal about what makes some of us worthy to be in the palace, while others must stay outside in the courtyard."

"Child, that is life! And those down in the courtyard are just as happy as we. . . . Hark! Do you hear that?" A lusty chorus of "*Hoch! Hoch! Hoch!*" rose from the square, and looking out, they saw the crowd waving and cheering. Across the platz in a window of the Imperial suite, the figure of white-haired Francis Joseph was standing, looking benignly at his people.

"You see," said the Countess, "he has finished his

simple lunch in his study. He isn't feeling so sad to-day, and the people are happy to see him smile at them, if ever so slightly." After a few moments the Countess turned from the window. "I must go, my dear," and with a nervous little glance about, she kissed Olga gently on the cheek and hurried away without looking back. The girl gazed after her, with a puzzled frown, caressing the spot her lips had touched.

When Soscha heard of this meeting, through a chance remark of Olga's, she expressed disapproval. "Why can't you be as nice to Otto von Lainz as you are to the Countess Dericote, who ought to know better than to encourage you to do things I have forbidden? Try not to be influenced by her. Here's Otto fairly languishing at your feet, even though you treat him shamefully.

"I can remember perfectly when you came here three years ago. Otto knew all that silly gossip about you, of course, and he was curious to see what the 'little Russian spy' looked like. You were nothing but a child then, but he was fascinated, as you very well knew, though you pretended not to. And now, in spite of the disdain he's endured, he's asked my permission to marry you and you are almost insulting to him, running away from him every chance you get."

"But Aunt Soscha, why should I be obliged to marry him? I don't want to."

"Don't be impertinent, Olga. You're certainly going to marry at some time, and where could you have better prospects? Otto is the youngest captain in all the cavalry regiments, and he'll be promoted as rapidly as possible. He's likely to be chosen for a diplomatic post

some day as well. And you can't deny that he is good-looking. He's coming to take you driving this afternoon, and it won't do you any good to refuse, because I've already made the arrangement."

Olga resigned herself to the afternoon's drive. She received Otto with his customary tribute of flowers stiffly, and was obliged to sit holding the huge bouquet that smelled sickeningly of tuberose during the entire formal drive with Aunt Soscha beside her in the carriage and Otto facing them. She found little pleasure in bowing to numerous acquaintances along the Prater at this fashionable hour. When Otto managed to send ardent glances in Olga's direction at intervals in the idle chatter about their mutual friends, Olga was coldly irresponsible, and Aunt Soscha pretended not to see, though Olga knew from experience that she would be called to account afterward for every disregarded sign of his affection.

Two or three days later, in his club, a fellow officer spoke to Otto. "How's it coming with the little Russian? Saw you driving with her in the Prater the other afternoon."

"She's more contrary, and got more pride than all the other girls in Vienna," he replied. "But I don't mean to give up. You ought to know me well enough for that."

"Well, her looks and her money are worth going after. And spirit in a woman is all right, if it's properly broken. I'd trust you to look after that, too." It was characteristic of Otto that he shrugged his shoulders coolly and took no offense at his comrade's words.

II

One June morning, when Olga was about nineteen years old, she was awakened as early as five o'clock by the heavy tread of soldiery. Lying indolently in bed, amid the sunlight, the fragrance of growing things, and the faint chirp of awakening birds, she remembered that this was the Thursday after Trinity Sunday, the time of Corpus Christi celebration. It was such a heavenly day, she decided that she would surprise Aunt Soscha by going to Mass in the Augustin Church, where the Emperor heard the service from his private box high in the church wall, connected with the palace by a passageway. Olga's lack of complete sympathy with the religion of the court had been another source of annoyance to Soscha. To a genuine Austrian the observance of religious forms was more than vital. "They're formal and deadly as the court etiquette," Olga would protest. "I like to worship as my heart tells me, and not when and however a priest prescribes." To which the shocked and dismayed Soscha would answer, "You little heretic! It's a wonder the Emperor gives his protection to anyone as sacrilegious as yourself." Then Olga would go and stand through a Mass at St. Stefan's, her heart uplifted and exalted by the service; but in the afternoon, perhaps, she would see Archduke Otto, observed standing so straight and serious that morning in church, brazenly driving out with his latest *amoureuse*; or there might be one of the Archduchesses who prayed demurely in the morning seen riding in the Prater, dashing deliberately into a little fruit stand and galloping off without a thought of the consternation

and misery for which she was responsible. Olga could not countenance these contradictions. However, on this glorious morning it was natural to forget them and feel thankful just to be alive.

Later she took her place in the dim chapel where the court had assembled for Mass. Olga noted her aunt in the seat which had been hers for years. She hoped Aunt Soscha would see her and realize how sincerely she felt the significance of the day, but when Soscha did look in her direction presently, she gave no sign of recognition by so much as a flicker of the blue eyes. Wrapped in her own thoughts, Olga had an impression of lighted candles, chanting, and the admixture of warm scent from wax and flower perfume and incense. Then the service was concluded and they were following the court flunkies along a corridor.

"Your aunt will watch the procession from our window," whispered Julie to Olga. "You must come, too. Archduchess Valerie was called back to Wallsee. Two of the children have just been put to bed with measles and they're quite ill. But Her Imperial Highness requested your aunt to stay here at the Burg." Günther's young wife, Melanie, and their two-year-old son were waiting with some others at the broad window from which one could already see the vanguard of the procession appearing. At the adjoining window was another group, with the old enemy, Theresa Haugwitz, in the midst of it. Olga and she had met frequently in the past years, since Theresa had been formally presented at court during the season Soscha had chosen for Olga. The school-girl enmity had in no degree abated, and on the contrary, there was an-

other cause for jealousy in the fact that Theresa was in love with Otto von Lainz, who paid little attention to her, short and swarthy as ever, and lacking Olga's artless grace. She was furious because he preferred Olga's spurning to her offering of passionate adoration.

The women at the windows were picking out relatives and special friends in the line of officials. There was no laughing nor chattering, but only the undercurrent of interest that even a religious spectacle of such huge proportions could not dispel. The commanding figure of Prince Alfred von Montenuovo had just gone by, with a silent reception from the window where Soscha and the Auerspergs were standing. Montenuovo, grandson of Marie Louise and Count Neipperg, was a dread figure at court where he had the imperial attention more directly than anyone else. Even the Archdukes feared him, and the Archduchess Marie Valerie hated him with her characteristic decision and never lost an opportunity to pour stories against him into her father's ear. Of late years, however, she had stopped active and open warfare, having long since learned its futility when, as a girl, she had nearly been deprived of her allowance for speaking too strongly against this relative who was, above all others, *persona grata* with her father. At the opposite window a low murmur of acclaim arose.

"Prince Alfred," Olga heard Theresa exclaim. "How I admire that man! He hates Russia and all the Russians with such a fine fervor."

"I'm glad we aren't troubled with them much at court," said another voice which Olga placed as Toinette Gosau's (née Benedek). Toinette, who wandered in an aimless

circle of existence with whomever she could find to take her! Just a year ago she had married rather an insignificant army man who achieved the only distinction of his career not long after by dying of heart failure during a hunt, an inglorious manner of being taken off, amid a nation of hunters. But Toinette made the most of her chance, consistently maintaining the rôle of a heart-broken clinging vine in the hope of replacing her poor dear Gosau before many months. All Olga's devotion to a vague desire in her heart of some day being able to help her poor maligned country rose in rebellion, as she was obliged to listen helplessly to these disparaging comments.

Suddenly her thoughts came back to the present. The hush all about was so deep and solemn that she knew the moment had come for placing the Blessed Sacrament on the crimson and gold altar, the last one of six erected on the line of march. The band, stationed near, had ceased to play the sweet, strong melody which Haydn gave Austria for her national anthem; amid the silence the Emperor in his blue and white uniform, followed by the Archdukes, would take his place in one of the gold and crimson chairs. Olga came closer to the window to see this picture of earthly pomp exhibited in honor of divine power. When the observance was completed, the procession moved on. Before long the Emperor would return to the Burg in his gorgeous and lumbering white and gold coach drawn by eight cream-colored horses. He had walked bareheaded behind the Sacrament over the entire route, and now he would resume his monarchical state. The crowds were scattering quietly, to go around by the Michaeler-platz on the chance of seeing Francis Joseph,

or at least one of the Archdukes, who were driven home in black and gold carriages drawn by six horses each. As Olga watched the people in their bright festival garments, she saw a tiny figure leave the edge of the walk and venture out across the Ringstrasse, still kept clear of pedestrians. There seemed no one to take her, and she was in danger at any moment from being run down by cavalry regiments that might be returning along the deserted street. Impatient at the heedlessness of the few soldiers and people who remained in sight, Olga decided to go after the child, and slipping away from the window, she went downstairs.

Just as she reached the edge of the walk a stalwart Hungarian guard came tearing down the avenue, the distinguishing leopard skins on his shoulder and across the horse's back flying about him. Straight toward the baby he seemed to ride, as the little thing stood stock-still in amazement at this giant thundering down upon her. Stifling a scream, Olga dashed out into the street in time to catch the child in her arms, as the horseman, almost on top of them, swerved aside with masterly skill and galloped on, leaving them untouched. The child gave a little cry of terror as the black hoofs flashed past. Weakened in spite of herself, Olga managed to get her charge back to the curbing.

In the palace Soscha, talking to someone who had just come along the corridor, missed her niece and prompted by an instinct went back to look out of the window just as Olga gained the sidewalk. The baby was whimpering and to Soscha's consternation Olga knelt on the dusty flag-stone to comfort her. Presently the two came toward

the palace, the baby toddling along, clinging to Olga's hand. Was Olga out of her wits? Soscha hurried toward the stairway; she must meet the two and get a servant to take the child. She gained the great hall, where the Emperor had just arrived in state. With his suite he was advancing toward the apartments where luncheon would be served. Caught in an awkward position, Soscha did the only possible thing and stepped into a window embrasure, hoping the court would pass by without noticing her. But just as the imperial party approached, a small door opposite to Soscha's asylum opened, precipitating Olga and the peasant baby directly in the path of royalty. However, Olga had seen her aunt first and made toward her across the corridor.

"Aunt Soscha," she cried. "Aunt Soscha!" There was a dead silence. Following her aunt's horrified gaze, Olga beheld the glittering vision of Majesty halted in its advance. As everyone in the Emperor's train glanced coldly at her, every particle of self-possession deserted her. She stood powerless to act, while the baby, awed and frightened once more, began loudly and lustily to cry.

Soscha was obliged to step from her place of concealment, whereupon Olga recovered herself enough to go to her aunt's side, leading the weeping child by the hand. She made a strange picture of disheveled loveliness. Dirt streaked the skirt of her delicate summer dress and the bodice was marked in crumpled spots from the baby's salty tears and the impression of her tiny head, yet the most disapproving courtier could not deny that she was beautiful. Realization of her *faux pas* had sent the hot blood surging to her cheeks. Soscha paid no attention to her,

and kept her eyes fastened on the royal countenance for a sign of favor. Francis Joseph looked dispassionately at the three, he said nothing, and presently gave the signal for the party to pass on. At least he had not chosen to make examples of them publicly, but the Countess Hohenwald knew that it would be strange indeed if she were not called to account for this untoward occurrence. From somewhere a servant appeared and led the child away. Olga's heart beat wildly as her aunt, in a cold, hard voice, said, "Come to my rooms, if you please."

III

The scene which followed was all that might have been expected in Olga's wildest flights of imagination. Aunt Soscha had raged and stormed. The poor lady could not help it, knowing the variable nature of the sovereign will and having been able to gauge correctly the precarious situation into which Olga had thrust herself. No one realized better than she what might have happened had the Emperor's mood been less benign. So misdemeanors of the past were revived by Soscha's fury; little naughtinesses or unintentional mistakes Olga had long since forgotten were recalled by her aunt's all-too-perfect memory. And finally Soscha delivered her ultimatum.

"You've played with us long enough, and you've neither bettered your manners nor improved your conduct," she said. "You have less respect for Austria's traditions and customs than when you came here, if that could be possible. I'm quite, quite through with you, save on one of two conditions. You will let me tell Otto von Lainz that you will marry him, or you go to the Carmelite Sisters in

Berlin." Olga looked at her aunt in astonishment. She had never believed that affairs could come to such a crisis. She was shocked and hurt. This could not be true; it was all a dream; Aunt Soscha could not mean to take her away from the comparatively happy life in the palace.

"Well! I am waiting for your answer," said Soscha.

"Do you mean that I must tell you now?" asked Olga in a piteous voice.

"I certainly do. You can't expect me to give you any more time to make up your mind. After four years you should have a fairly definite idea of your feelings. Once and for all, will you marry Otto?" Olga quivered beneath the furious lash of her aunt's words. She drew a deep breath and pride came to her aid.

"I'd rather die than marry him," she answered quietly, meeting Soscha's blazing eyes. It was to be a question, then, as to who should come off victor in this contest of wills.

"Very well. You may get your things ready at once. We'll not waste any time in fruitless discussion. You will be ready to leave for Berlin to-morrow afternoon. Go to your room and begin to pack." Olga went out, realizing clearly for the first time that life had strange things in store for her. Instinctively she believed that this prison to which she was being sent could not hold her forever. Some day she would break out of it, and then she would follow this call that was beginning to stir her heart in rebellion against existence that drove one around within the limits of a circle and had no mercy nor pity for the poor sufferer outside the sacred ring.

CHAPTER V

I.

THE two years of convent life in Berlin were more dreadful than Olga had thought possible. In fact, there were many days when, if Soscha had been near, the girl would have flung herself in agony at her aunt's feet and begged to be taken away, anywhere, to anything, rather than be left to this desolate existence. A thousand times she would have welcomed the convention-bound life at the court. In her present state it would have been the height of rapture to be one of the throng of ladies in splendid evening dress dancing at a court ball, taking the cue for every action from the Emperor; the irksome demands against which she had protested would have been indeed welcome, for Soscha had developed an exquisite punishment. Olga had not been sent to the convent for an education, though she was given certain duties and a few studies with which to occupy her time; but she had been allowed no new clothes, even when those she had brought with her became thread bare and shabby; she was not allowed any spending money, not even for writing paper. At first she had not dreamed that her aunt could be so revengeful, and at Christmas-time had expected to receive a message telling her to come back to Vienna for the holidays; but no word came. June blossomed again and summer's approach gave her hope once more. Surely she

would be taken away for the season; yet once more there was only silence from Vienna. Olga could not understand such determination; she was by turns angry and sick with disappointment. At last, when springtime of the second year had come with no call from Vienna for her to return, Olga decided to ask advice of the Mother Superior. The Sisters had always been kind, but they had been forbidden too much association with the girl.

"Mother," said Olga, at the beginning of the long-desired interview, "what have I done that I should be punished so? I have not meant to be wicked, yet I am shut up here like a naughty child. What can I do? It isn't right for me to be kept like this, without decent clothes, without a penny to call my own. I'm old enough to live my own life, and I want to do it. Aunt Soscha treats me like a stubborn child." The Mother Superior looked at her steadily.

"So, you do not think you are a stubborn child?" she asked gravely. "What would you do if you were away from here?"

"I suppose I should go back to Vienna. Even the court life is more free than this, and I want freedom. Freedom, Mother! Not to be shut up like a caged bird and made to sing whenever I am told." But the joys of freedom meant nothing to the nun, and only sounded the note of worldliness toward which she taught others to turn deaf ears.

"Ah, my child, you are still very young. Your aunt, the Countess, does well to direct you, even when her ways seem harsh. Do you forget that obedience is the first teaching, obedience above all things to the will of God?"

And that there must be obedience, even when we do not understand why? Your aunt is a wiser woman than you, my dear, and she has cherished you these years. Are you doing right when you hurt her by persistent and wilful disobedience?

“‘Honor thy father and thy mother’ is the commandment. Your aunt stands for you in the relation of father and mother, and accordingly you should honor her wishes.”

“But you know what she wants me to do?” cried Olga. “I must stay here until I promise to marry the man she has chosen for me. I said I would rather die than do that, and I meant it. I don’t love the man. He’s hard and cruel and arrogant. But I will die if Aunt Soscha treats me like a prisoner much longer. I’ll die or go mad.”

“Hush, hush! You must not say such things. You ask me what you can do? There is nothing, save to bow to your aunt’s will. If, however, you would renounce the world we would give you a haven here in our little community. You have seen how peacefully we live.” Olga sat silent. She had no wish to accept this alternative.

“I could not tell you now, Mother. But I’ll think about what you have said.”

“Think, my child, yes! And pray. Have you forgotten that you are in His hands? He will always help you if you ask Him.”

And Olga had risen and gone away to face once more in silent struggle the courses that lay open before her. She was forced to acknowledge the bitter truth that Aunt Soscha had defeated her, that her will had been broken.

She was young and life throbbed in her veins. She would swallow her pride, she would do anything to get away from the quietness and seclusion that shut down upon her like a stifling pall. So in the end she made her decision, and a telegram was sent to her aunt with the pitiful message, "I will do as you wish, awaiting your reply."

II

In Vienna Soscha experienced the satisfaction and triumph of having gained her point at last. She summoned Otto and told him the news, which he accepted with modified enthusiasm. During the two years just past he had been enjoying himself rather intensely after his own fashion, and was less ready than he had been to assume the responsibilities of a married man, even though he had no intention of letting marriage interfere with his pleasures. Soscha, quick to guess what was passing in his mind, breathed a sigh of gratitude that Olga's surrender had come before it was altogether too late. Otto was "Colonel von Lainz" by this time, and more of a catch than ever. The marriage would have to be arranged as soon as possible; it was early in May when Olga was to return to Vienna, and by the end of June she must be the wife of the dashing officer.

Then suddenly her plans were altered. In England, the king, Edward VII, had died and etiquette demanded the attendance of representatives from all the courts and royal families of Europe. Francis Joseph would not make the journey, it was announced, but his place would be taken by the Archduke Francis Ferdinand, the nephew who had become heir apparent after the death of Crown

Prince Rudolph. Among others ordered to join the party on its special train were the Countess Soscha Hohenwald and Colonel Otto von Lainz.

"I have news for you, Otto," said Soscha, meeting the young man in one of the audience chambers after the Emperor had dismissed his court. Otto, tall and dark, dressed in a new white uniform, seemed never more handsome than as he stood easily and gracefully before the countess, absently pointing his precise and fashionable little black moustache. "His Majesty has given permission for Olga to return to Vienna on the imperial train, if she can be taken to meet us. He will permit her to join our party in London. And I shall buy part of her trousseau while we are there."

"Indeed?" he answered. "I am beginning to grow eager to see Olga. It would scarcely seem possible for her to have become more beautiful. Yet, perhaps, meditation in the convent has softened some of the rebelliousness that distinguished her at times. I hope the seclusion hasn't made her pale and wan."

"Don't fear that," reassured Soscha. "You should realize that she has too much spirit to lose interest in life so long as there is breath in her body. She's young, and the young can't languish away without more reason than she's had. You'll not find her looks impaired."

There was a great deal to be done. In addition to her own preparations for travel under these peculiar circumstances which demanded new and complete outfits of the most fashionable mourning, Soscha was obliged to get some clothes ready for Olga. The maid Sophia, whom Soscha had retained even after Olga had left Vienna, was

to be dispatched with the clothes under orders to bring Olga safely to London. They were to meet the Austrian train at Flushing and cross the Channel with the party. Needless to say, Olga was intensely excited over the journey. Her aunt had telegraphed hurried instructions, and Sophia would be in Berlin on the evening before they were to leave for Flushing.

The Mother Superior had seen the telegram and took occasion to point a moral. "You see, my child, how easily matters go when once you become resigned. You were willing to obey your aunt, and behold this way has been opened for you. I am sure that everything will be for the best."

"Yes, Mother," agreed Olga. She would have agreed with anything in her present state. She was frantic to get away, out into the world of freedom. They should never shut her up like this again.

Then Sophia arrived with the new clothes. They were black, of course, but there was a note from Aunt Soscha promising the bright new garments of her trousseau when they should get to London. "I am making an exception in your case," said the note. "It might seem bad form to buy something that wasn't mourning, but people excuse young lovers." Olga had a shrewd suspicion that Aunt Soscha intended to get a bargain or two out of the London shopkeepers, who had suddenly no demand for anything save mourning, of which they could not get enough.

"You do look a little pale," announced Sophia, critically, with the assurance of an old friend. "Madame Hohenwald was afraid you might be too thin. The Colonel doesn't like scrawny women, she said. But you

haven't lost any flesh. And being pale like that makes your eyes look more brown. Your hair's still a good color, too." One by one Sophia was enumerating her charms, as though she had been sent to make an appraisal.

"Be quiet, Sophia," commanded Olga, at last. "You're making me ill. You sound as though Aunt Soscha were running a slave market. I know I'm selling myself, but we'll not discuss that." Olga would resolutely stifle the sadness and disgust in her heart. After all it was spring-time, and hope had a way of filling one's soul with new courage. Something of joy and happiness must be in store for her. At least she was exchanging this prison for a life that couldn't be much worse.

III

When it was time to leave that afternoon she bade farewell to the Sisters and the Mother Superior with a joyous heart. She would never forget them, she said. True enough, and for reasons they could more than guess. In a cab with Sophia she whirled away to the railroad station, not quite sure, as she watched the people on the streets, that it was not all a dream; not until she was safely and actually on the train could she believe that she would not awaken in her tiny room at the convent. At the Potsdamer Bahnhof, she was almost bewildered by the noise and confusion that seemed twice as great after the silence to which she had been accustomed. She followed Sophia in awed admiration as that worthy bought tickets, bullied and cajoled guards and porters into doing her bidding. Their train was called and they hurried through the iron gates. Sophia motioned the porter, with

whom she went on up the platform. Olga looked about and saw a train directly beside her. A train was a train; they were all alike; in fact Olga didn't see any others amid the dull roaring and rumbling of cars and engines. Her consciousness at present was capable of accepting only one thing at a time. Logically she arrived at the conclusion that this must be her train, and suiting action to the thought, climbed aboard. On the platform she stopped an instant to see whether Sophia was coming back, and at the same moment there was a slight lurching beneath her feet. Olga leaned out over the steps and called wildly into space, "Sophia! Where are you? Hurry, the train is going." But no Sophia appeared until the train had gathered momentum and was rolling smoothly away. Then Olga saw her running frantically down the platform, shouting and waving her arms. "Poor thing! She'll get it from Aunt Soscha for missing the train," thought Olga, as she turned to enter the car.

"This is a funny-looking car," she said, half to herself. "Trains must have changed a great deal in two years. This coach is just like one long room. A long table, too. It can't be a new kind of a car to eat in. But where are the people?" The chairs of red plush and mahogany looked comfortable, so Olga, like Goldilocks in the house of the Three Bears, tried two or three of them and finding one to suit, settled herself to await the appearance of other passengers. After a time, she picked up a book from the table and began idly to read the English text in which it was written. She had had some lessons in English, and as long as she was bound for London, she decided to test her knowledge of the language. Absorbed in

this interesting diversion, she did not notice a man in military uniform, who entered from the opposite end of the car, stopped and looked at her as though he were seeing an apparition.

"*Nun, nun!*" he said at last, in deep, stern tones. "How is this? What do you do here, *Fräulein*?" Olga jumped at the sound of a voice, and looked at the officer. This was the first man who had spoken to her in two years. To his surprise she dimpled and smiled at him.

"Are you the conductor?" she inquired. He stiffened haughtily. "Well, well," he said testily. "*Well,*" she repeated, "I only want to go to Flushing. My companion had the tickets and she missed the train, so I can't give you any money because she hasn't given me any yet. But I don't want to cheat you. My aunt will make it all right, once we get to Flushing." The officer started to interrupt, but she went on. "Don't they have compartments on this train? I was just thinking how queer these cars are." Again the man stiffened as though he had been insulted.

"For mercy's sake, say something then, and tell me why you keep straightening up like that all the time, and looking so fierce."

The officer continued to peer sharply at her, and was about to swing 'round on his heel when the door opened and a young man in civilian clothes entered.

"I say, what's all this," he inquired cheerfully, looking from the grim-visaged officer to the trim, attractive stranger. Olga gazed at him in turn and approved of his height, his solid build that was nevertheless not stocky, his light brown hair and his blue eyes; he was not

a German, she decided. The officer also looked at him, but with an odd commingling of forced respect and disdain. A glance at the girl, and he turned abruptly on his heel and left the car.

"He's the strangest conductor I ever saw," said Olga. "He seemed to be angry at everything I said, and when I asked him where the compartments were, I thought surely he'd——" She stopped short in confusion. What was she doing, speaking so freely to this strange young man? She blushed violently, and was the more embarrassed as she felt her cheeks growing crimson.

"Don't be alarmed," the young man said, gently. "I don't want to be discourteous, but I should like to know how you happened to get on this train. Please don't be afraid to tell me." Olga was thinking what the Sisters would say if they could see her in such a situation. Then suddenly she remembered that it didn't matter any more what the gentle Sisters thought. She was free, and for this moment at least, she might do exactly as she desired. There was no harm in telling this nice boy about Sophia's having missed the train.

"I've been in a convent in Berlin," she said at last. "But now I'm on my way to meet my aunt at Flushing. She's going to England for the king's funeral, and I'm going to meet her train from Vienna. My companion had our tickets and money, but she missed the train."

"Your aunt is at the court?" he inquired.

"Yes, she's the Countess Soscha Hohenwald. I used to be at the Burg myself until I went to Berlin."

"I didn't think you were Viennese, exactly."

"My mother was Russian, but my father was from

Vienna. They're both dead now." The young man seemed to be studying her thoughtfully.

At that moment a group of men came in and stood together at the other end of the car, looking at Olga and talking among themselves. Some of them were of a German regiment whose uniform she recognized. One of the others was the mysterious "conductor." To Olga's astonishment, the nice young man suddenly excused himself and went toward them. She watched them for a while, then turned back to the English book, which seemed to be a sort of guide to London. It would be good for her to read that, and it didn't matter about money and tickets so long as nobody seemed to want them very badly. Meanwhile the young man, Victor Renfrew by name, and Canadian by birth, was having some difficulty persuading the Germans that the girl was not a suspicious person. He couldn't quite understand why he had so definitely become her champion,—but he was convinced that there were no lies back of those clear brown eyes. He told them that the girl expected to meet a relative on the Austrian imperial train at Flushing.

"What could be more plain?" said the "conductor," when Victor had finished speaking. "Those Austrian pigs have used this young girl to discover the plans of the Fatherland, and learn Germany's part in the services. I know those Austrians. They don't mean the Fatherland to gain much, even in such a matter as the respect paid a dead monarch. We ought to put this Austrian spy off the train." The others looked undecided.

"Well, I say that girl isn't a spy," said Victor, emphatically. "No spy living could simulate her innocence.

She's telling the truth. And the thing to do is to let her stay on the train anyway. If she were a spy she'd have learned plenty by this time; but look what she's doing,—looking out of the window. Would your genuine spy be doing that?"

"Yes, but let me tell you," interrupted the suspicious officer who had first discovered her, "she has been reading those books on the table. I saw her. She can read English."

"Did you notice the name of the book, by any chance?" inquired Victor, with sarcastic politeness. "Does a spy read Baedeker's 'London'? If she didn't know the town she'd have memorized the guide book by this time. She wouldn't waste these precious moments doing that." He saw that he had his auditors with him, and he gave them a final clinching argument. "It might be just as well to work on the thesis that she's telling the truth. It would be embarrassing for the Wilhelmstrasse to have to explain why an Austrian subject was regarded with insulting suspicion on an imperial train, particularly if the girl does happen to be meeting the Austrian court party." He had the satisfaction of realizing that this last was the telling stroke. After all, the Germans were bound for England and it would not do at this time when their Emperor wanted to make the most favorable impression possible for even the tiniest cloud to appear on the diplomatic horizon. Above all, complications with Austria should not be allowed to arise.

"What can we do with her?" asked one of the officers.

"Let me suggest that I advance the money for her fare," responded Victor. "She doesn't know what train

she's taken, and we must pretend that it's only an ordinary one. We can act just like ordinary passengers. The ladies' maid you brought can fix a stateroom for her. We'll pretend that Lensdorf here is the conductor, and he can collect her money." Victor smiled wickedly to himself as he made this suggestion before the haughty officer. "He was the one who found her first, and she thought he was the conductor, anyway." Lensdorf was none too popular, and he was obliged to endure the illy-concealed appreciation of the rest.

"Well, that's settled then," said Gentzman, one of the party. "I guess you're an alarmist, Lensdorf. But anyway, you don't let a pretty girl put blinders on you. *Gott*, she *is* a fine creature."

"She don't put the blinders on me, no! Not like on some others," muttered Lensdorf, whose little balloon of authority had been so sadly punctured. If he had been able, he would have planned revenge on this upstart Englisher, but the circumstances of their mission made revenge unwise. Perhaps some day! As the men went out, Renfrew called, "Come back in half an hour and collect the money! That'll be time enough!"

Victor approached the brown-haired girl waiting in the red plush chair. "I beg your pardon, Fraulein! May I tell you what I have done?"

"Yes," answered Olga. "You've not been put to any trouble on my account?"

"No, indeed, I assure you. Only it is arranged that you pay your fare to the official who first came in. If you will permit me, I'll be glad to lend you some money." Olga hesitated. But what else could she do? "Please

don't feel that you can't accept the money," he pleaded, and at last she agreed.

IV

Olga had never imagined that traveling could be so pleasant. All that afternoon, until the neat maid informed her that her stateroom was ready, she had chatted with this young stranger, who told her his name, and enough of his personal affairs for her to know that he was from across the seas and that he had been in Germany for some months visiting the forests and making chemical analyses that would help him in his business as a paper manufacturer. Intuitively he had known that this was the first time she had ever traveled without a companion, and he did everything in his power to put her at ease. He discovered that she possessed a naturally keen mind, but there seemed moments when she was under a singular spell that made her quiet and curiously afraid to speak. He struggled to fathom the mystery. It must have been the convent life, he decided, nearer to the truth than he knew. And at last it had been time for dinner, which Olga had alone in her stateroom, with its little brass bedstead and its complete furnishings. Dusk had deepened outside the train, rushing swiftly into the sunset-tinted west. Lights flashed on in the other cars, particularly the one in which Victor and Olga had spent the afternoon, where green-shaded globes now threw their light close over the wall-maps and over the table where a group of men met in council.

Morning came, and Olga wakened away from the con-

vent walls for the first time in many months. She could scarcely believe it, as she lay in the shining brass bed and watched the sunlight slipping from its spindles. Then she thought of the Herr Renfrew. Would he seem as charming when she met him again as he had on first impression, *if* she met him again? Ah! She hoped that would be possible,—and soon. Even as she thought, there came a rap at the door, and his voice calling her.

“Fraulein von Kranz, Fraulein!” he said softly. “I beg your pardon, but we’re only an hour away from London. Will you do me the honor of having breakfast with me?”

Olga sat upright in bed and thrust out one bare foot. “Thank you,” she called. “Will you give me fifteen minutes?” Then as she dressed, she recalled what he had said. An hour away from *London*, not *Flushing*! She pulled aside the window curtains and looked out on green meadow land. Neat little cottages and fields bordered with snowy banks of flowering hedge, the beloved hawthorns of England. What on earth had happened? Was this a dream? Where were the Austrians? And Aunt Soscha? What would she say? What would she do? Panic seized her. What if Aunt Soscha sent her back to the convent? She would kill herself first. And after she’d trusted this young man? How could he have let her go beyond *Flushing*? She finished dressing in an agony of haste and rushed out to find Herr Renfrew, almost colliding with him in the corridor beyond her stateroom.

“What have you done?” she asked, reproachfully. “I’ve gone past the station where I should have met my aunt. She’ll be very, very angry. It makes me tremble to think what she may do. I didn’t believe you’d forget me and

let such a thing happen." Victor was alarmed to see her so genuinely worried.

"My dear Fraulein, I couldn't prevent it. Believe me when I tell you that the train went through Flushing without stopping. It was taken directly aboard the boat during the night and we crossed at once. Are you sure your aunt will be so angry? Once you have explained, she'll be reasonable."

"Oh, but you don't know! She'll think I've done this on purpose. If it had happened any other time." Since she did not offer further explanation, Victor sought to soothe her by distracting her thoughts. He persuaded her to eat a bit of breakfast.

"And tell me," he said, "where we may send you in London. Have you some friend to whom you can go?" Dismay filled her afresh.

"Oh dear! I don't know Aunt Soscha's plans. I don't know where she meant to stay. I'll have to go some place. I can go to my other aunt, Lady Middleton. She lives at Grosvenor Square. Do you know where that is?" Victor smiled.

"Is Lady Middleton your aunt?" he exclaimed. "I've seen her so many times and heard my friends speak so highly of her."

"I haven't seen her myself in years. She's my mother's sister, a Russian by birth. I've not written to her in years. Aunt Soscha didn't like me to, but I suppose she'll let me come to her." Again there was that unnatural sadness in her voice and eyes. Victor could not understand it, but he knew that someone had been making this lovely creature very unhappy.

"Of course she will," he reassured her. "She'll be delighted to see you. You needn't be alarmed about your reception. Lady Middleton's far too fine not to understand your situation." Privately Victor did not see how anyone could be ungracious to this girl. He was ready to continue his championship on British soil.

CHAPTER VI

I

A TAXICAB whirled away from Victoria station, bearing Olga von Kranz off on her first ride in such a vehicle. The novelty of her position and the glimpses of London through the cab window served to dispel some of her apprehension. Her natural exuberance of feeling was gradually returning; she had met an interesting young man under unusual circumstances; and for a time at least she was absolutely free from Aunt Soscha's influence. Whatever might come, for the moment she would enjoy Life! So she came to No. 30 Grosvenor Square, an imposing gray stone house, its entrance barred by a quaint door of wrought iron. Telling the cab-driver to wait, Olga rushed out and up the steps. Presently, in response to her vigorous pull at the bell, a man in dark-green livery opened the wooden door and peered through the iron grating. He squinted with disapproval at the hired conveyance by the curb. Lady Castleman's victoria went past, and the sensitive Tompkins shuddered with outraged family pride as he saw the noble lady raise a supercilious lorgnette.

"Will you please tell Lady Middleton that Olga, Baroness von Kranz, is here? I should like to come in at once, please." Tompkins looked at her intently, without moving to open the iron door. Baronesses didn't drive up in public vehicles. "I must come in at once," repeated Olga.

"Just excuse me, miss," murmured Tompkins, with another look, and glided away. Olga fumed with nervous impatience, but just as she was about to pull the door-bell again in desperation, the man returned. "Lady Middleton will see you, miss," he said, sliding the bolts. "This way, if you please."

In the long, narrow, high-ceilinged drawing room Alix Middleton, widow of the ninth Lord Middleton, slender and brown-haired like Olga, had been sitting near the open windows at the far end of the room talking to a man some years her senior, when Tompkins, her butler, had first announced the entirely unexpected arrival of her niece, "a young person, m' Lady, who says she's Baroness von Kranz, your Ladyship's niece." Never before had the mere enunciation of a title been made to express discreetly such volumes of disgust. At any other time, Alix Middleton might have been more suspicious, but her first caller, Sir Alfred Sidney, tall, lean Englishman with a Dundreary mustache, a man of intimate acquaintance in Downing street, had come that morning expressly to tell her that the Countess Soscha Hohenwald, he had just learned, was one of the Austrian party bound for England. Sir Alfred's most important mission in life, in his own opinion, was to convince Alix Middleton of his devotion for her, and in the line of duty, also in his own opinion, was forever looking after her interests and her pleasures. He had known she would be more than interested in the arrival of this quasi-relative, the dragon guardian of the little girl whom Alix would have been only too glad to have adopted in her childless and husbandless state. But for the interposition of Countess Hohenwald's will, Olga might

have been enjoying the benefits to which Middleton's heir would be entitled, as well as furnishing an outlet for the expression of Alix's thwarted motherhood. Olga had been told as little as possible about her mother's sister, and Alix's news had come principally from her brother Michael. Once she had seen the child during a brief summer's visit to Pskov, but Michael's removal to France and the child's departure for Vienna had left her with even more scanty information as to Olga's welfare than formerly. Now it seemed almost uncanny to have Tompkins, in this somewhat dramatic fashion, announce someone who called herself Alix's niece. When she had sent the butler away, she rose and began to walk with quick, nervous little steps to the window and back.

"I say, you should be careful," warned Sir Alfred, standing with his arms folded, chin in one hand. "Fearful lot of impostors likely to be comin' in on us in these times, don't you know. I'd make sure this girl's story is sound."

"But fancy if it really is Olga!" exclaimed Alix. "If you only knew how it seems like an answer to prayer." She turned to hide her emotion, looking through the long windows at the patch of green lawn and the flower-starred garden in the freshness of a May noontide.

"Haw! Yes! Quite right,—if it really is," he agreed, eager to share any feeling that stirred this woman he loved. Then Olga appeared in the doorway, following at Tompkins' heels. "Jove," thought Sir Alfred, "there is a resemblance, at that. Not the eyes, but that mouth and chin! Rippin' looking enough, anyway!"

"Aunt Alix?" faltered the girl, slim and childlike in her correct black.

"Olga! Little Olga, is it really you?" Alix came toward her with arms outstretched. Alix was a wise woman, and kindhearted; she was like Olga in her readiness to take a great deal on faith, though tempered by experience and judgment in her case. Had she been of English birth, she might have hesitated now, but native impulse responded to Olga's mood. "What a surprise! You're not here alone? Where is the Countess Hohenwald?"

"I've had the most dreadful time. I've come by another train, by mistake. Aunt Soscha will be furious. I didn't know her plans, so I came to you. Herr Renfrew was right. He said you would understand. Sophia, who was coming with me, was left behind in Berlin. She has my bags and my money, but Herr Renfrew paid my fare.

"Will you give me some money now, Aunt Alix, to send back to him by the cab-driver? He's waiting outside,—the cab-driver, not Herr Renfrew. If I might have it at once, please. I'll tell you how it all happened, only I want to pay him." Alix released Olga from her embrace and turned triumphantly to Sir Alfred.

"I don't know what blessed saint I have to thank, but my prayers are answered. Sir Alfred, this is the little one I have hoped to see after so many years! Olga, my dear, you must know Sir Alfred Sidney, whom I count among my very good friends." Sir Alfred bowed to acknowledge Olga's murmur of introduction. "Now, dear, how much money do you want?"

"The fare from Berlin here, Aunt Alix. I don't know how much it is in your English money. He paid my cab fare, too."

"Four pounds ought to do nicely," said Sir Alfred, in response to a glance from Alix.

"Very well! Will you ring for Tompkins, please?" Alix was looking at Olga with hungry eyes. "How you have grown, you precious child!" Olga dimpled with pleasure. She thought of the difference between her Aunt Alix's manner and the treatment she would have received from Aunt Soscha.

When Tompkins had been sent off to get some money from the housekeeper's strong box, Olga found a little leather card case in her coat pocket. Into this would go the money and a note. "I'm sorry to be so much trouble, but is there a little piece of paper on which I might write a note to thank Herr Renfrew?" Sir Alfred drew out a flat case and extracted a card. "If this will do, you are welcome to one of my cards."

"Oh, thank you! I'll write only a line," and she scribbled hastily, "With thanks for lending this to me. *A bientot!* Olga von Kranz."

"Tompkins, will you give this to the cab-driver waiting outside?" said Lady Middleton, reaching out a hand for the little purse and the note. Olga interrupted, "Aunt Alix, may I *please* go to give him the money myself? I want to tell him just what to say." Alix looked a trifle disturbed. "Please, if it isn't too dreadfully bad form?" She was so distressed that Alix smiled in spite of herself.

"It isn't done generally. But we'll excuse it, in your case. At least let Tompkins send out for your luggage," she suggested.

"I haven't any bags, Aunt Alix. If Sophia comes on

the train I should have taken I'll get them in a day or so."

"You *are* rather unconventional, aren't you?" Alix asked playfully. "Well, run on out, but don't be too long about it." The girl went away, followed by the humbled Tompkins, who thought in self-justification, "All I can say is I hain't accustomed to 'aving Baronesses drive up to No. 30 in 'ired 'acks of whatever sort!"

"Now do you believe she's my little Olga?" said Alix to Sir Alfred. "I think you succumbed rather quickly yourself, in spite of your warnings." Sir Alfred smiled.

"Haw, dear Alix! I'd an excellent reason, all my own. Did you catch the name of the young man to whom your niece is sendin' the money? Renfrew, it was. Well, there can't be two chaps of the same name bound on the same errand, and I happen to know that a young protégé of mine, one Victor Stanbury Renfrew, from out in Canada orig'nally, is comin' through on the advance imperial train from Berlin."

"Advance imperial train?" said Alix. "What do you mean?"

"Just this! The little Baroness must have taken quite the wrong train, and gotten on the one they send ahead of the Emperor to clear the way. Somebody, I've reason to suspect Victor, must have succeeded in keepin' her in ignorance of the nature of the train she was ridin' on. Must have known how distressed she'd be if she knew. So when I heard his name, I knew the girl's story was straight enough. Wait until you've seen young Renfrew, too, and you'll understand. I met him first when he was just a lad completin' his education on the Continent, as the Stan-

burys finish all their men. His mother was a Staffordshire Stanbury, you know. At any rate, the lad had a leanin' for the diplomatic service at that time, so I took him down to Ostend one summer when they were watchin' a few of the Austrians who'd come up to Belgium. Diplomatically it was a fluke, but I got to be fond of the boy. I've followed his career quite closely since, and he's gone in for forestry and the manufacture of paper from wood pulp. Gettin' on for twenty-nine, and out in Canada he's started several new concerns to make wood pulp. He's got a good thing, and it's very successful, I'm told. They'd have lost a good business man to gain an indifferent diplomat, so it's just as well he didn't go in for the service.

"But that's my reason for disregardin' my own warnin's. D'you see now why I offered one of my cards for the message? I can fancy old Victor havin' the shock of his life when he sees my name. I'll drop 'round at Claridge's this afternoon and look him up. If I vouch for him, d' you mind if I bring him in for tea some day?"

"No, indeed! Couldn't you include him in our party at some of the services? Of course this affair with Olga has complicated matters for me, but we might plan to go out to Windsor together."

"Capital idea, capital idea. I'll bear it in mind."

Olga returned at last, and Sir Alfred hastened to make his *adieux*. "Must be goin' on, really," he insisted. "Dozens of things to do. Very busy time, this. Very sad, too."

"If you must go," said Alix, thankful for his tactful understanding of her wish to be alone. "I'm going to write my name at Marlborough House this afternoon. There seems to be so little one can do."

When Olga and Alix were left together, Alix must first feel the girl sheltered in her arms again for a moment. "I can't believe that I have Marie's baby with me. You must tell me all about yourself." Presently they were upstairs, where Olga could have a cozy little room adjoining her aunt's dressing room, a dainty place of pink hangings and white walls that overlooked the garden. As they talked their hearts out Alix learned a great many startling things, among them the reason why Olga happened to be leaving from Berlin instead of Vienna. Tears came to her eyes at Olga's brave but pathetic recital of those lonely months with the Carmelite Sisters; within her there was stirring a keen fury against the cold and heartless Soscha. What a dreadful punishment for the child! That explained the wistfulness one surprised sometimes in the girl's face. It explained her fear of Aunt Soscha. Olga was loyal and made no accusations, saying simply that she "must have been very difficult for Aunt Soscha to discipline," but Alix read another story between the lines.

"We must invite the Countess to stay here," said she. "You see I had no idea she was planning to come, else I should have sent an invitation to her in Vienna. We must get into touch with her as soon as possible, for she'll worry about you."

II

That afternoon Alix took Olga with her when she went to pay her respects at Marlborough House. "You'll have a chance to see London, dear, even though it isn't gay. But I think you'll find the mourning on the shop fronts and along the streets very impressive," she had said.

While they were gone, three important messages were left at Middleton House, the first of them filling the drawing room with fragrance and color. "Baroness von Kranz," read Alix from the card attached to an enormous basket of deep red roses which greeted the two on their return. "Come here, young lady, and tell me who sends you such passionate posies. There's a note here, ever so thick and fat!"

"What wonderful roses!" exclaimed Olga, burying her nose in their velvety petals. Opening the envelop she found the bank notes of her train fare enclosed with a written message. Here was an answer to the unspoken question that had lingered in the back of her mind, plaguing her to know whether or not she should ever again hear from the handsome young Canadian. "Why didn't you tell me that you knew Sir Alfred?" said the note. "He has obtained permission from Lady Middleton to bring me to call. Please ask her to explain why I am returning the money. *A rivederci*, Victor Stanbury Renfrew."

"Do tell me about the money, Aunt Alix," begged Olga, handing her the card. Alix laughed when she had read the brief lines.

"You'll be a bit surprised, dear. Did you know that you traveled on one of the German imperial trains, in advance of the Emperor's?"

Utter dismay filled Olga's face as she heard the story. "What a stupid goose I was! How silly and thoughtless he must think I am," she said.

"No, darling! He knew that something unusual had occurred. He is a very gallant young man, to my way

of thinking. When he realizes how you had just gotten out of a convent under circumstances as they were, he'll be more than happy to find his judgment sustained."

Then Alix read the second message, from Sir Alfred, to say that the Austrian train had come in at noon and that the members of the party were already in residence at Kensington Palace. There, then, she must send her note.

But the third message made her decide differently, for Tompkins announced that the Countess Soscha Hohenwald had called in person to see Lady Middleton, and wished Lady Middleton and the Baroness von Kranz to call at Kensington Palace as soon as possible. It was significant that Soscha had discovered so quickly that Olga was in London, and where. She must be anxious, if she could come directly to Middleton House with such a demand. Alix was furious at the idea of being ordered to go out in such a manner, but for the girl's sake she felt that Soscha's whims must be gratified. Time enough later to check her when something really vital was in question.

"I dare say she'll want me to go to stay with her now," said Olga, quietly, when she heard of her aunt's call. Opposition to Soscha's will never occurred to her. Alix made no comment, save to say calmly, "We'll drive over, dear, and see how soon the Countess Hohenwald can arrange to come to Middleton House." Alix was determined, once and for all, to learn how far Soscha would go to keep the child under her control. If she could be persuaded to leave royal surroundings at Kensington Palace, it would mean that she was bound above all other things to watch closely over her niece.

III

Soscha's emotions, on failing to find Olga and Sophia at Flushing, had roused her to a pitch of feverish anxiety. She was deeply chagrined at once more having been embarrassed before the court. But when they reached London, a young secretary of the Austrian embassy informed her that Baroness von Kranz had arrived early the same morning on the advance German imperial train, a bit of intelligence which served somewhat to restore her own mental equilibrium and her self-respect in the eyes of the court. True enough that the circumstances of Olga's journey were as yet unrevealed, but the trip itself was *fait accompli*, which was all that mattered for the present. However, the next and greatest difficulty arose when Soscha discovered Olga's choice of lodgings. Consternation and dismay filled Soscha's soul. Here was a complication for which she could not possibly have provided in advance. One never could anticipate with Olga, anyway; here she was actually taking shelter with the last person in the world Soscha had meant for her to see, save in the course of the most formal calls. This action on Olga's part made her own position more difficult; should she be able to stay in Kensington and what could she do if Lady Middleton seemed disinclined to surrender her charming visitor? Decisive action was needed, hence Soscha's call at No. 30 Grosvenor Square.

The interview later with Lady Middleton and Olga was peculiar. In some ways Soscha felt as much of a stranger to the girl as she did to the woman; it had been almost two years since she had seen her niece. Soscha noted

with satisfaction that Olga was as lovely as ever, slender, and just pale enough to look interesting. Beside that she seemed extremely eager to show Soscha that she was willing to do whatever she wished, even as she had signified in her telegram. Alix, watching the two, was torn between pity for Olga's state of fearsomeness and a desire to shake her into defiance; but she realized only too clearly that the defiance must come from her, and must be very subtly shown,—though precisely how she might effectually daunt the Austrienne was more than she knew at the time. However, luckily for Alix, Soscha saw at a glance that she had a worthy protagonist and acted accordingly. She, too, was willing to gratify whims for the sake of future and more complete victory. To Alix's surprise, even though she had been ready for it, Soscha accepted the invitation to stay at Middleton House. "Unfortunately I cannot come this evening," she had said, "but you may expect me early to-morrow morning. I have freedom to make my own arrangements, and it will be pleasant indeed to be with you, poor dear Marie's sister. This sad occasion becomes a time of delightful reunion for us; does it not?"

To Olga she said, "You must receive Colonel von Lainz at the first opportunity, my dear. He is most impatient to see you. There is a beautiful ring. I dare say you have told Lady Middleton of your happiness." Soscha was determined to make Alix talk.

"Yes," the latter responded, simply, "I am very eager to meet Colonel von Lainz. I understand that he is admirably well connected."

"Admirably," agreed Soscha. "It is an excellent match

—and a love match, too, though our little Olga here is shy about confessing it.” Alix writhed at the unction of her tone.

IV

When Soscha was installed at Middleton House, she began at once upon her discreet campaign of trousseau-shopping. She had the functions and duties in connection with the King’s funeral at her tongue’s end and meant to waste no time, either before or after, in getting Olga’s wardrobe ready. She would not outrage her sense of propriety, indeed not, but appointments must be made with Redfern, in Conduit Street; Raoul, who was to make Olga’s boots; the milliners, glovers, drapers; and above all, with Worth in Hanover Square, who would make the wedding gown. Colonel von Lainz should have no reason to be ashamed of his bride. That very afternoon Otto had paid a punctilious call at Middleton House, coming with all the glory of royal equipage, the red liveried driver and footman wearing crape bands on their sleeves. Though he was not in full-dress uniform, he was nevertheless magnificent enough to disturb an undercurrent of interest in the household. “You should have thort ’e was arskin’ for the Princess Royal ’erself, Tompkins sez to me,” related Boots, below stairs. “*E* sez, Tompkins sez, as ’ow ’e thinks it’s queer goin’s on. Some on ’em above stairs is too cheerful, the Countess What’s-’er-Nyme, partic’ler. She’s got orful little boots, ’as the Countess. Come by w’en H’I’m a-rubbin’ of ’em up, an’ see for yourselfs.”

What Otto discovered had apparently made him cheer-

ful, too, for he had gone off in extreme good nature, leaving behind him the ring and a glowing pendant ruby, set with several quaintly-cut diamonds. It was a gorgeous thing and in exceedingly bad taste.

"Poor boy," Soscha excused him; "this is a difficult position for him. To be so much in love!" And Alix had her own opinion of the "queer goin's on," especially in the course of Otto's call, when she had found her fingers rather too fervently clasped and held in farewell; but it gave Alix a clue.

v

The next afternoon Sir Alfred came to escort the ladies to Buckingham Palace, where they would see King Edward's body lying in state before it was taken to Westminster Hall. He had brought Victor with him, and the two came early enough to pay a brief call on Lady Middleton.

"I'm not exactly observin' the formalities," apologized Sir Alfred, "but the lad here has been busy straightenin' his affairs, else I'd brought him 'round sooner. He was goin' to the Palace this afternoon, so I thought you'd not mind my bringin' him along." Meantime Alix had the opportunity to contrast his demeanor with that of their caller of the previous day. No arrogance in this young man's face, no "swank" in his manner, yet there was a quiet strength that seemed to be biding its own time. This blue-eyed "boy," so she thought of him, was nevertheless a master of men,—and might be of women, too, if he chose. She liked his quietness and deference, and she

saw with satisfaction that these very characteristics were disarming the confident Soscha, who paid as scant attention to Victor as Otto had paid to her the day before. Apparently the Countess regarded him as some underling who had favored them enough to be entitled to recognition, though the acquaintanceship need not be continued. Olga, for her part, sat shyly and silently by during the call, in agony lest too much should be said about her unfortunate mistake in Berlin; Aunt Soscha still remained in blissful ignorance of the manner of her coming, and Olga dreaded the time when she should be informed. But very little was said of the trip, and presently they departed for the Palace.

People were coming and going through the halls, where a solemn hush governed them. In the Throne Room, guarded by his faithful Grenadiers, lay all that was mortal of Edward VII, in quiet and peacefulness, a white pall, heavily embroidered, covering the coffin surmounted by the iron crown from the Tower and the King's sceptre, orb, and royal diamond crown garter on a cushion. At the foot of the coffin the flag of the late King's company of Grenadier Guards was stretched on the floor. Soscha sank to her knees there where Alix and Olga also knelt for a moment's prayer in the presence of death's majesty; for it was majestic in the stillness of the palace that had been an earthly king's dwelling. Sir Alfred and Victor waited at a slight distance, the heart of the latter filled with a curious mixture of pride and affection for the girl who put her heart into the performance of this simple, tender rite. When the party had come out of the Throne Room, Victor walked beside Olga down the broad stairs.

"The post brought your note to-day," he said. "You were too good to think so highly of the roses. It was the greatest pleasure for me to send them, I assure you."

"Oh, but what a stupid person you must think me," replied Olga, shyly. "It was kind of you not to mention my mistake before Aunt Soscha this afternoon. I have almost died of shame as it is."

"Please don't say that! It was perfectly natural for you to have taken that train. Young ladies become accustomed to depending upon their companions, I should fancy, and you were naturally bewildered when yours disappeared. I'm only thankful that I happened to be on the train. That one fellow was quite positive that you were an Austrian spy, you know. That's really the reason why they wouldn't let me call you at Flushing."

"They didn't take me for an Austrian spy? Oh, how dreadful! Do you know that once upon a time, in one of my schools, the girls thought I was a Russian spy!" Olga smiled a twisted, wistful little smile that touched Victor's heart. "The Germans would have arrested me, I'm sure. Then Aunt Soscha would have been furious, so think how much more grateful I must be to you for saving me. I never shall be able to repay you." Victor blushed and looked intensely uncomfortable.

"Oh, I say, you know, I shouldn't have mentioned that Austrian business. Never meant to. You'll think I'm an awful bounder."

"No! It's quite right that I should know. And I *do* thank you." Olga was about to say more when Aunt Soscha came hurrying up to where they had stopped at the foot of the staircase.

"Come, come, my dear! Lady Middleton is waiting. We are to drive to Selfridge's before we go home. We must make haste to reach Middleton House by tea-time." And before either Victor or Olga could sufficiently comprehend the situation, the girl had been whisked away to the carriage. Victor stood staring blankly in the direction in which she had disappeared, until he felt a hand on his arm.

"What's up, old top? See a ghost?" Sir Alfred's voice whispered. Victor turned with a start.

"Eh? What's that? A ghost?" He shook his head and replied gravely, "Not a ghost, a vision!"

CHAPTER VII

I

NEXT morning the ladies returned to the Palace before ten o'clock to witness the procession to Westminster Hall. It was a scene of color, despite the note of mourning, for there were flags, even though hung with crape, and uniforms, gay enough for all their black banded sleeves; there were the royal coaches, particularly the scarlet and gold equipage with glass sides, in which Queen Alexandra rode, looking never more regal. It had been a difficult transition for Olga from such impressiveness to the details of gown fitting, but Soscha had made at least one appointment for that day. Then there was a quiet tea at Rumpelmayer's with the two aunts, Sir Alfred, and Otto, this time on Otto's invitation. He was in high spirits, having unexpectedly obtained a card to the Cavalry Club in Piccadilly, whence he had just come from a pleasant afternoon of boasting about Austrian horsemanship. But the climax of the day itself had come when Sir Alfred surreptitiously slipped into her hand a tiny folded note, giving a prodigious wink and a tug at his mustaches.

"Thank you," she said, simply, scarcely daring to believe the evidence of her senses as she thrust the missive into her coat pocket.

"I beg pardon," said Otto, looking toward her.

"It was nothing," Olga smiled at him. "Sir Alfred

picked up a trinket for me. I thought I'd lost a bangle from my bracelet." Sir Alfred grinned amiably at Otto. "I merely said 'Thank you,'" finished Olga in a mild tone. But the mischief had been done.

It seemed ages before Olga had the opportunity to open and read what had been written, she knew instinctively, by only one person in the world; but at last, alone in her room at Middleton House, she unfolded the paper. "As you know, Lady Middleton has been good enough to ask me to dinner this evening. Suppose I forget that dinner is to be at eight o'clock and come a quarter of an hour earlier? Would you be down?" and simply the initials, "V. S. R." Olga frowned doubtfully. Here was a problem. Although it was practically two hours before dinner she began to dress automatically, thinking the while. Many times since her arrival in England, she had pictured what life would be if she were permitted to stay with her aunt Alix, whom she was beginning to adore. It was easy to observe conventions here because Aunt Alix seemed always to be playing some cheerful game, and what one did was simply to follow the rules. "Sporting,"—that was the English word that fitted it exactly. They used the word in England a great deal, Olga was learning. Something was a "sporting proposition," anything that was a good idea might be "sporting"; and Olga decided that it would be sporting to live with Aunt Alix, who had a way of sharing with one all sorts of delicious little jokes and pleasantries. Lord Middleton, whose portrait hung in the hall along with his ancestors, must have been fond of the gay-hearted, lovely Alix whom he had won away from her school-life in Petersburg. But one might

not think of staying with Aunt Alix; Aunt Soscha was planning otherwise, and without question one obeyed Aunt Soscha, soliloquized Olga. Only,—and the little word had so much significance,—only if one *might* stay here, and did not have to go back to marry Otto, one might become ever so much interested in the young Canadian, “V. S. R.” Why should he ask her to come down to dinner early? What could he possibly have to say to her? Ah, now she knew! Perhaps it had to do with that dreadful mistake of taking her for an Austrian spy. She had best see him, after all, Olga thought, lying bathed and dressed in *négligée* on the big soft couch.

At seven-forty-five when Alix, detained by an unexpected crisis in her household affairs, and Soscha, delayed by an equally unexpected call to Kensington Palace, were both hurriedly dressing in their rooms, Olga was waiting down in the drawing room, irrelevantly wondering whether “V. S. R.” would ever see her gowned in any color other than black. And presently he was there in the doorway, looking at her with such evident delight and satisfaction that her heart gave an involuntary leap.

“The aunts came in late, I’m afraid. They are dressing in a whirlwind,” Olga greeted him breathlessly.

“You had my note, then,” he said, lifting her hand gently to his lips. Knowing perfectly well that this was merely a form, Olga was nevertheless vaguely comforted, though she told herself that she had no right. She must think of something else to say, since he did not speak.

“Have you had more trouble about the Austrian spy business? I was alarmed when I read your note.”

“Nonsense,” laughed Victor gently. “That isn’t why I

came here early to see you. Did you think it was? I've forgotten all about the train, excepting to be thankful because I met you there." He looked deep into her eyes. No! In her heart she knew that his coming had nothing to do with her recent adventure. Victor laughed again for sheer joyousness. "Come, and sit here," he led her gently to a divan whence they could look through the half-drawn curtains out on the garden. "What I want to show you is a foolish little photograph. A photograph of my Canada." And there was in her hand a sepia print of an attractive house set among trees, the lawn sloping to the bank of a river that curved and broadened just at the right of the picture.

"What place is this?" she asked, when she had looked at it for a long moment.

"Our—that is, *my* summer home outside Brockton. These woods are all around us, the river's just here."

"Where is this Brockton? In Canada?" she smiled up at him. "It's charmingly pretty, Canada, isn't it?"

"I'll tell you what the days are like," he answered, and behold she was with him in every hour. He was poetic in his pastoral of woods and water, more than she had imagined an Englishman could be, so that in thought it was easy to go with him to this place across the sea, this place hidden in the forest where love would be. It might be a foretaste of heaven really to be there with him. Her eyes were pensive, sweet, and as he watched her face he said, though the words did not matter, "From the porch one can watch the sunrise." He bent toward her, she closed her eyes. What were these treasonable thoughts surging through her mind, pumping her very heart's blood

up into her face? She had no right to think of this young man so. There was a rustle of silks in the hall. Lady Middleton and the Countess were coming downstairs. Victor rose as they came in, thrusting the photograph out of sight.

At dinner Otto, who had taken Olga in, was a curious combination of ardor and indifference. There were only the five of them as audience, but Otto managed to have a splendid time recounting tales of his prowess. The sight of Olga had stirred his blood in spite of himself, though to a feeling very different from Victor's almost reverent regard. Otto was beginning to swell with the pride of possession, and the presence of these two "Englishers" urged him on. Soscha was glowing with pride as she listened to him discourse first on military affairs, on his life in Vienna, and finally on the girls he had known, finishing of course with an elaborate rhetorical flourish in Olga's praise. The other three, Alix, Alfred, and Victor tried to appear interested and Soscha attributed their rather forced politeness to jealousy. Olga was very uncomfortable, and not at all flattered by Otto's comparisons of herself with other conquests of his own. In fact, both Sir Alfred and Victor had come close to clenching their fists beneath the table; Viennese society was not London's and there were things to which one did not refer, no matter how lightly, about the dining tables of Grosvenor Square. But as the grand climax, Otto sprang to his feet and proposed a toast "to the most beautiful woman in London or out of it, the woman who is to become Frau Colonel von Lainz." Victor felt his knees growing weak under him, so that he could scarcely rise.

He looked at Olga for a sign to tell him that this could not be; but with one pleading, imploring glance, she averted her eyes and sat with downcast lids. It was only a card castle, then, this house of dreams he had so foolishly builded. Victor had almost an impulse to draw out the picture of the house in the woods, tear it and fling the pieces before the girl. But somehow the wretched business of the toast was gone through with and presently Lady Middleton and the other two women withdrew. Olga was heartsick, too, for she had seen the pain and sorrow in Victor's eyes and knew that he was thinking she had played unfairly with him. Well, it was all over now, and this curious ache in her heart would have to be stilled somehow. She was very docile when Aunt Soscha manoeuvred so that she and Otto might be settled together in a corner of the room after the men had come in.

Somehow the evening dragged, a circumstance which they attributed to the general sadness and mourning of the time, which would naturally creep into even the pleasantest family gathering,—and this had suddenly ceased to be one of the most pleasant. At last the men pleaded stress of affairs for the next day and were ready to go, Victor still bearing the hurt look in his eyes. The sight of it maddened Olga to desperation at last, particularly when Otto tried to linger behind the others in the drawing room and kiss her good-by. She laughed tantalizingly up at him, eluded his embrace and escaped into the hallway, where Victor had just taken his hat and stick from Tompkins. Determined to speak, she approached hurriedly and whispered breathlessly, "Please don't look at me so! You can't understand, else you'd not be hurt and

angry." He looked at her steadily. Dare he believe that she was giving him hope? But before he could speak she had disappeared through the drawing room door.

II

It was not until Friday morning, the day of the funeral, when Victor accompanied Sir Alfred to call for the ladies at Middleton House that he had the opportunity to speak cautiously of what was lying so close to his heart. "E-er, has Baroness von Kranz been engaged to this fellow von Lainz long?" he ventured to ask Sir Alfred, who looked keenly at him, though Victor was relieved to note that this glance seemed void of any consciousness of Victor's feeling in the matter.

"Sad case, that," said the nobleman. "Lady Middleton was tellin' me yesterday a bit of how the old girl, the Countess, y' know, has been set on marryin' her niece to von Lainz ever since the girl came to Vienna four or five years ago. The little Baroness is rather a fiery piece, I take it, an' she refused to become engaged. Finally her aunt shut her up in a convent until she'd consent. She's only just given in, an' that's why she happens to be in London now. The Countess was ordered here for the funeral and wired to have the girl join her, comin' on from the convent in Berlin. You know as much about the rest of it as I do, save that I'm dashed if I don't think it's a crime to let that rotter marry her. Didn't like his talk the other night by a long shot."

Victor looked up at the clear blue sky, with its flecks of soft white cloud. Was there no justice that such a sacrifice could be permitted? This delicate creature given over

to a worthless man who would make her his toy,—satisfied only so long as his curiosity was piqued? What a pitiful confession it was that she should have been willing to marry to be free of virtual prison existence there in the convent! A high-spirited little thing like that should be guided in the right way and then given her head. What a woman she would be in the right environment! Victor's thoughts went back to that moment in the drawing-room when he had told her of the little house in Canada. If he could do something, perhaps if he could only "understand,"—that was what she had said. So he was all tenderness and consideration when at last the six of them were rolling off through the streets to Paddington station, between rows of black-clad people along the curbs. He sat with Alix and Sir Alfred in one of their two carriages, now feeling no jealousy to see Olga and von Lainz together. And Olga, who had dreaded this first meeting since the dinner, needed only a glance from his eyes to tell her that he had learned enough, through whatever mysterious channels, for him to understand in a measure; so that in her heart there was suddenly a strange and comforting assurance.

They went down to Windsor by an early train without waiting for the official one for which they had tickets. The three from the Continent had never seen the place, and by this arrangement there would be an hour before the services began. It was a wonderfully beautiful day to ride through the rolling English country where spring had starred the fields with flowers like white and yellow and pink and palest blue enamels against a green background. In the midst of this for the day were hundreds

of rosy-cheeked children with their fathers and mothers come to sit in the grassy fields and watch the trains pass. White pinafores and blouses, with black ribbons and ties, had been put on the little folk making them look strangely alike. Then the grim beauty of Windsor Castle appeared, gray towers against the blue sky, while on the river white excursion steamers stirred the shining water as though the modern age had pushed its very nose into the midst of those feudal times of which the great castle stood a reminder. From the station the party went up the steep hill between lines of guards keeping the road clear of black-clad people who pushed close to the uniformed ranks, while others more fortunate filled windows and balconies along the way. Coming under the archway into the courtyard opposite St. George's Chapel, Olga was amazed to see the heaps of floral offerings in a variegated mass against the stone wall, an abundance of color and fragrance. For almost an hour they strolled about the upper and lower wards, stopping occasionally in a shaded spot on the walls to look out over the countryside. Soscha and Otto, however, showed little disposition for sight-seeing and were happiest when they could return to the midst of the throng coming and going near the Chapel. Otto chose also to pay a great deal of attention to Lady Middleton; Olga was so curiously subdued, and without realizing what it was, he missed in her the charm of unchecked spirit which had been hers before she had been sent to Berlin. So at last, back in the quiet crowd Victor had an opportunity to talk with the girl about whose person all his thoughts were centering constantly.

He blessed the orderly confusion which thus gave him the chance to speak.

"Doesn't the glorious sunshine of this wonderful day seem strangely prophetic?" he asked, as they stood for a moment in the courtyard before passing into the Chapel. "It's easier to think of life and love on such a day than to think of death."

"Yes," she answered softly. "One dares almost hope on such a day." Olga pressed her left hand over her heart with a pathetic little gesture of hopelessness that belied her words. Victor smiled at her with wistful tenderness. Would anyone ever be able to make her completely happy?

"For what things does one dare to hope? You give me courage. I've wanted to hope for things myself."

"I can't think of you without courage enough to claim what you want. They've told me what wonderful things you've accomplished. You couldn't have done anything without courage." She smiled gently.

"Ah, yes! But even the best of us have moments of weakness and terror. I saw a great strong elephant once smash his pen to kindling in blind frenzy because a little mouse had crept over the floor. Just so one little thought may sometimes put so much panic and fear into our minds that we lash out recklessly and quite ruin our lives. That's how I've not been brave enough to face the truth calmly and hopefully." Beneath the crape veil that covered her face, he could see the brown eyes gleam suddenly with compassion.

"I'm so sorry. If I could help you. Would you tell

me about it some day? It's often easier just to be able to tell someone, isn't it so?"

"My dear," said Victor quietly, "that's what I've not had courage to do yet." He was miserably conscious and ashamed of a silly lump in his throat. Olga looked at him steadily for a moment before she dropped her eyes. "I hope your courage will not come too late," she said, lifting her head quickly and gazing persistently away from him.

Two hearts at least in the vast assemblage were beating incoherently when finally the party went into the Chapel where sunlight from the open doors on either side came gently in like a path of dusky gold whereon the motes of dust flickered and danced against the gray walls and the smooth purple velvet that covered the tiers of seats. Just outside one could see tree-tops, their tender sun-touched leaves scarcely fluttering in the hot still air. Sir Alfred and an usher led the way to their places near the choir. The two hearts felt a strong, sweet uplifting; it seemed a benediction to have been able to come into a dim, quiet church after the blazing revelation that had stirred them. Victor bent to put his hat beneath the seat just as Olga raised her head after breathing a little prayer, which had not been entirely for the repose of a monarch's soul, and to her dismay it was only with difficulty that she kept her fingers from straying to touch the soft thick hair brushed back from his forehead.

Then one o'clock sounded and outside the minute-guns began to fire amid the tolling of bells. Within the Chapel the clergy, headed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, came down the nave toward the great doors while the congrega-

tion rose and the women lowered their veils over their faces. Through the silence came faint strains of the funeral march, growing clearer and clearer; outside a horse's hoof stamped impatiently; there was a low-voiced word of command; with a long roll of the muffled drums and a shrill mournful note of bagpipes, the music stopped and two or three sharp blasts of a whistle meant that sailors were lifting the coffin from the gun-carriage. When the procession began to move back along the nave gentlemen of the household, heralds, and others stopped in the aisle, a living colorful passageway through which the clergy passed, followed by the white-robed choristers singing of the "Resurrection and the Life," without even the notes of the organ to break the spell of human voices chanting their faith in the immortality of the soul. Directly behind the coffin walked King George in full-dress uniform, escorting by the hand Queen Alexandra, graceful as always, the pallor of her face contrasting with the severity of her mourning. Following these two was the Emperor of Germany, who conducted the only other woman in the procession, Alexandra's sister, Empress Dowager Marie of Russia. It is to be confessed that this man chosen to come next after the new King of England was a central figure of the time and it is to be acknowledged that he made good use of his advantages. Periodicals of the day did not hesitate to wax enthusiastic over the manner in which the Emperor gracefully, graciously, and persistently endeavored to divert the suspicions of the English people from his country. His very insistence upon subordinating his privileges and rights to those of the English royalty seemed so simply sincere. No one was more care-

ful to observe the little courtesies; a correspondent wrote, "when there was a hand to stretch to the Queen or to Queen Mary, his was the hand stretched." "His bearing was that of one on whom the whole meaning of the solemnity rested; his countenance a study in profound but mournful affection" said eye-witnesses of the funeral ceremonies; yet how much of this was dissemblance, only time could prove. The rest of the procession was composed of visiting royalties and ambassadors. There were officers in bright uniforms of state and there were others in plain black, including the famous American, Mr. Roosevelt, and in definite contrast there were the Chinese representatives in pastel-shaded robes.

The service was most impressive, and at the close when the coffin had been lowered into the vault, the Garter King at Arms advanced from his place to read a proclamation in quaint old English of the death of the "most mighty monarch, King Edward VII, by the grace of God." A pause and he exclaimed in clear tones that carried through the Chapel, "God Save the King!" Verily, the King was dead, "Long Live the King." It was a solemn moment and instinctively Olga and Victor looked at each other for a fleeting instant; as they watched the departing royalty she knew he was not seeing anything in the present, that his vision was going forward to meet hers, perhaps in the midst of the Canadian woodland where the little house stood beside the river. Soon they all went out through the choir, where withdrawal of the white-robed ecclesiastics and uniformed princes made the place seem darker in its candle-light with the banners of St. George's knights hanging dimly above the stalls. Several feet

below the floor the coffin was discernible, and before it everyone bowed in final homage. The air was heavy with the scent of flowers from the adjoining rooms and the tent outside.

Luncheon was served in two great halls of the castle for the invited guests, and for once Olga's party was to be divided. Sir Alfred, Lady Middleton, and Victor were to be together, while Olga was to go with her Aunt Soscha and Otto in the Austrian group. It was the first time Olga had been included in the party with which she was to return to Vienna. There was a busy hum of conversation all about, for in this period of general relaxation after the solemnity of the morning, friend was greeting friend, despite the fact that the conversation was almost entirely of personal recollections of the late king. As the extremely good luncheon progressed Otto began to feel rather gay and at ease with the world and himself, so that he began to pay Olga little undertone compliments. "Soon now we will be back home in Vienna, eh?" he inquired cheerfully. "Home! That will have a new meaning for me now, my little one. Ah! That first moment when you are mine!" He sighed and seemed fairly to pierce her with his black eyes, so that she shuddered involuntarily and closed her own. "Ah! She, too, trembles with ecstasy at the thought. My marble maid will be warm flesh and blood, eh?"

It would be hideous, Olga was thinking, unbearably hideous when she must know the foul depths of this monster's mind. How could Aunt Soscha be so blind and callous and heedless of the instinct that warned Olga away from his arms. But she must endure it somehow,

since there was no other way save that one she had already tried without success.

III

Then fate sent an interlude in the progress of the days. The Austrians were not to leave London until the following Wednesday, which would give Soscha just enough time to complete Olga's trousseau. Sir Alfred had an idea for their entertainment during this interval which, having been discussed with Alix, resulted in the establishment of a house party at Sir Alfred's place outside London at Twickenham on the Thames for the week-end. It wouldn't seem irreverent to royalty to spend a few days of this glorious May weather amid the charms of York House. "I'd like to give the little Baroness a taste of genuine old English country life before she goes back to Vienna," he had said to Alix. "If we could only forget the Countess and von Lainz, we'd pretend for a day or two. Eh, what?"

"I'm not obliged to pretend one thing,—that you're an exceedingly thoughtful person," smiled Alix. "You'll have your reward some day."

Whereupon Sir Alfred smiled ruefully and said, "I plead guilty to bein' selfish. I doubt if I'd be exertin' meself if there wasn't a reward in it, y'know."

"Nonsense!" replied Alix, laughing aloud. "I know you better than that."

"No doubt, no doubt," he agreed, "but I'd thank you not to forget the reward altogether. I shan't, y'know, and I shan't scruple to remind you of it, either, from time to time."

So they went to Twickenham, with a young English

couple added to the party, the Hon. Alice Corning and Lord Malcom Fitzhugh, who didn't mind the prospect of a fairly tame week-end since few people were venturing even to leave town. Soscha approved thoroughly of Sir Alfred and what she chose to believe were his means of giving Olga and Otto another sentimental memory of England; she distrusted Alix and was not quite sure of Olga, but this English gentleman was so honest and frank that one could almost read his thoughts in his face,—*almost!* In her self-confidence, Soscha was in danger of forgetting the little she knew of his diplomatic experience. But at any rate she interposed no obstacles in his way and prepared herself to enjoy this intimate glimpse of country life.

Tea was served the first afternoon on the terrace, from whence one gained a view of "Eel-Pie Island." Alix, doing the honors at the table set beneath a striped awning, remarked about the porcelain service. Victor and Malcom were handing the cups around like well-trained Englishmen. "Kind of you to admire it," answered Sir Alfred in reply to the polite chorus of approval from the rest. "Belonged at Strawbr'y Hill in the old days, y'know. Walpole was a hound for his tea and fussy about his china. Pers'nally I'm not so keen for that set, though I do fancy it for the association."

"Twickenham's quite a renowned place, isn't it?" said the Hon. Alice, idly. "Even got a little air about a penny for Twickenham Ferry, or something of the sort. I'd an old nurse who used to sing it to me when I was a wee thing. I've quite been brought up on Twickenham. Genevieve Gibbons used to live here, didn't she?" inquired Alice,

looking mischievously at Victor, in whose face the color mounted a trifle in spite of his efforts. "‘He’s burst his garter, Your Majesty,’" she caroled gaily, going off into shrieks of mirth. "I declare I’d almost forgotten that."

"Wish to the Lord you had," muttered Victor, while the Austrians looked from him to the Hon. Alice, and to the others who smiled in appreciation of a shared joke.

"We should explain why we’re laughing," said Lady Middleton. "You see this Genevieve Gibbons was married to Lord Gerald Moffett in St. James’, years ago, when Mr. Renfrew was a small boy. It was an extremely fashionable wedding, and the late King and Queen Alexandra attended, among others, with royalty from the continent, as well. Genevieve had a number of young cousins whom she asked to be flower girls, and Mr. Renfrew, whose mother and Genevieve had always been pally, in spite of a difference of some years in their ages, was the little page." Lady Middleton turned to Victor. "You poor boy, I’ll make it as easy as possible for you."

"At any rate," she resumed, "the little lad of seven or eight was so sweet in his white satin and lace suit, with a thatch of sunny hair that wouldn’t be ‘slicked’ down on his head, that he was quite almost a counter attraction to the bride. After the ceremony when the little flower girls, led by the page, started to go among the guests with favors of tiny bunches of heather tied with silver ribbons, Their Majesties were kind enough to speak particularly to the little page. He was very polite to the Queen, but suddenly, just as the King was about to bend and speak to him, a look of agony spread over his face so that he acted queerly and distrait. The King was a bit puzzled

and the bridal party was distressed, when on an instant, one of the flower girls—which one was it, Alice?”

“Lady Elizabeth Jennings,” prompted the other. “You remember, she married Captain Witherspoon and went out to New Zealand two years ago?”

“Oh, yes! Anyway, the tiny flower girl, Lady Elizabeth, piped up in a determined little voice, and said to the King, ‘Please, Your Majesty, he’s burst his garter!’

“Of course you can imagine the smiles on the royal faces. What was it the King said, Victor? Come on, tell us like a good fellow.” The whole party was laughing now, and Olga, with tenderness in her eyes for the sturdy little lad, tried to conjure a vision of the stalwart Victor as a tiny page in white satin who’d “burst his garter” within the sacred precincts of St. James’.

“Oh, he said, ‘Run along and fix it,’ or some such pleasantry,” said Victor, smiling ruefully. “And he patted my head and gave me a little trinket that happened to be in his pocket,—my mother saved the thing until she died, of course. I admit that I was mightily embarrassed, almost as much as now. I’ll get even with you, Alice, for remembering Genevieve!” Everyone laughed gently.

“As we were saying,” Victor continued ironically, “isn’t Twickenham a beautiful place?” More smiles at his sarcastic triteness, but Olga took him at his word and expressed her approval.

“Oh, I love it already,” announced Olga with so keen a trace of her old fire that Alice looked lazily at her with a quizzical twist of her brown head.

“My dear! You’re almost American in your enthusiasm.”

"Wait until we've had you out on the river," said Sir Alfred. "You'll see all the show places. Even that old island yonder's got a history. A century or two ago the Princess Anne of Denmark, Queen Anne she was later, used to live in this very house an' bring her little son, the Duke of Gloucester, down here for his health. The little chap, Gloucester, had a whole regiment of lads his age who came here with him an' used to be taken for exercise an' drillin' over on the island."

"But Eel-Pie is such a queer name! Why is it called so?" asked Soscha.

"Back in 1859, or thereabout, there was a tavern on the island, called at that time Twickenham Ait. 'Ait's' a dialect word for island. Accordin' to Murray's history 'a house of entertainment was erected for those solicitous to banquet on eel-pies, for which the tavern was famous.' There's no tavern there now, but the people use it for a picnicin' spot."

"Quaint, I'm sure," replied Soscha, stiffly. There was an awkward silence until the Hon. Alice came to life again.

"Toffy dear," she said, bestowing upon Sir Alfred a pet name of her own in memory of the beginning of their friendship in her flapper days when she craved an enormous amount of sweets and he had always a pocket full of toffee for her delight. "Toffy dear! Will you ask Baron von Lainz to take me walking down to the willows? I've been waiting for him to have an inspiration." It was Olga's turn to gasp in astonishment at the English girl's nonchalance. Otto rose to his feet, attempting feebly to conceal his satisfaction at this signal honor from

an English beauty. He gave his mustaches a final pointing and walked to where the Hon. Alice was reclining in a basket chair.

"Permit me," he said punctiliously, bowing before her, whereupon she got out of the chair and they went off together looking ridiculously like a pair of strange peacocks.

"God bless you, my children," Toffy called after them, with an airy wave of the hand. "There's nothin' more for me to say. Run along, look where you're goin', and mind you don't fall in the water."

"Toffy dear!" mimicked Lady Middleton gently, as soon as Alice and Otto had gone off down the lawn. "Come over here and I'll tell your fortune from your teacup. I've not done that in months."

"D'ye think you'll find a better one than you've been in the habit of givin' me? Take warnin' that I'll not stand for any more prophecies about 'tall gentleman with a present.' There's nothing any tall gentleman can bring me that I want; a little lady's got the only thing——"

"Hush, Toffy! Remember there are children present," rebuked Alix, smiling merrily at Olga and Victor. Soscha had gone indoors with young Fitzhugh to see a book of old English prints he had brought down with him.

"They'll not be here long," announced Victor, smiling and rising from his chair. He turned to Olga. "Will you come walking with me? I'll show you a quaint bit of old French garden that the Comte de Paris, who also lived here once upon a time, planned to remind him of the Trianon. Would you care to see it?" Olga looked questioningly toward her aunt.

"Yes, go, dear, if you want to," said Alix. "It's all right. I'll answer to your Aunt Soscha." As they went off the older couple smiled tenderly after them, and smiling still turned to look at each other.

Startled and delighted by the expression in Alix's eyes, Sir Alfred looked abruptly away, murmuring, "Haw! Charmin' girl, charmin' girl, the little Baroness, my word!"

IV

Around the corner of the terrace hidden by a circle of big trees was the tiny French paradise. An oblong of smoothest grass was bordered by finely graveled paths with narrow flowerbeds running along beside them. Little daisies were already in bloom and there was promise of tall spikes of larkspur and fragrant roses. At the end of the *tapis vert* was a green-painted trellis as background for a tiny little fountain of dolphins and water babies flanked by two shallow stone urns and two marble benches. Victor had brought some cushions which he tossed on one of the benches.

"Is this fairyland, I wonder?" asked Olga, gazing out over the gem of a garden. "Even the Roman ruins at Schönbrunn were not so quaint as this." Victor was thinking it scarcely possible that he and she were together in the garden, away from everyone else, and answering his thought she said, "Nobody realizes anything about the rapture of privacy who hasn't lived in the Austrian court."

"Do you know what you are like?" he asked irrelevantly. She turned with a smiling question in her eyes.

"When I saw you walking in this wonderful light, you were like a silver birch tree."

"I'm glad that my gray gown——" she began.

"It wasn't the color of your gown exactly. And silver birches don't belong in formal French gardens," he interrupted.

"Silver birch is very pretty, but my hair doesn't go with the name. I should be fair, like you."

"I've found you a name. You must choose one for me."

"Sit down here beside me, please," said Olga.

"When the silver birch has given me a name." He stood smiling down at her, his glance like gentle kisses on her brow. As she looked up at the tall straight figure a slanting ray of sunshine found their retreat and in the light Olga narrowed her eyes like one descrying something on the far horizon. "You are like a poplar in a plain," she said softly.

"Forget then that I ever called you 'silver birch,'" he said suddenly, sitting down beside her on the cushions. "Another, a better name, comes to me. If I am a 'poplar in a plain' you must be what I have sometimes thought you, a little bird of passage, touching our lives ever so lightly in your flight from one land to another. Since you have spoken so, I shall want to remember that even the most adventuresome birdling may sometime come to rest in the strong arms of the poplar." Silence in the garden for a long moment. A humming-bird floated over the barren rose bushes, from the river came the faint far-off whistle of a little steamboat.

"I have brought you something to-day," said Victor at

last, drawing from his pocket a heart-shaped locket delicately wrought and enameled. "Promise me you will wear it always?"

"How beautiful! I should want to wear it always," the wistful note was creeping into her voice and the old sadness into her eyes. Resolutely she smiled and fastened the chain about her throat. "The colors and the silver chain are so lovely against my dress." After a while she hid the locket in her gown. The light wind played with her loosened scarf, sending it wavering like a fleecy cloud across his face. "Oh! I'm sorry!" She sought to draw it away.

"No! Don't hold it down in your lap! Let it blow as it will! Its touch is like a gentle thought."

Although in words she did not thank him for his gift, her whole heart sang thanksgiving. All her life she would remember what the world was like to-day, she kept thinking, as she looked out over the green expanse.

Shaded lights were beginning to gleam in the drawing room windows and the cool of evening came creeping up from the river. Victor rose reluctantly. "I dare say they'll wonder at the house where we've gone. And you've not got any wrap, which is more important."

"'Where we have gone,' yes! Where have we gone?" sighed Olga softly, rising. From the bench she handed him the blue cushions.

"So far, my dear, that there is no going back," he answered gravely. She made no reply and only went down the shallow step to the level of the path and on toward the house. Together they walked in silence, for both of them knew in their hearts that he had spoken truly.

CHAPTER VIII

I

VICTOR was downstairs early Sunday morning; so early in fact, that as soon as he had assured himself by stepping out-of-doors that it was a warm, balmy day, he was in time to send a note out to be put on the Baroness von Kranz' breakfast tray. Merely "Good-morning," it said, and would she save some time during the day that he might take her out on the river?

The note despatched, Victor set himself to work on some papers he had brought down with him. Business had rather gone by the board during the past week, and he was obliged to straighten affairs and plan his departure for Canada within as short a time as possible. Life in London would be intolerable when the little bird of passage had flown back to Vienna. In vain he tried to fix his mind on soda pulp and sulphites, import tables, and pine cellulose,—but to no purpose. A company in Canada had acquired an acreage with several thousand trees and had an option on more land in the same locality. Victor picked up the letter asking his opinion on the acquisition of more poplars, with which this land was planted, for sulphite pulp. Poplars! All he knew about poplars came back in a few sentences. "You are like a poplar in a plain." "Even the most adventuresome birdling may sometime come to rest in the strong arms of the poplar." A

gray gown and a fluttering scarf. Victor shook himself impatiently. What was he coming to? Was he a man with a mind and a brain, or a silly school boy? He couldn't get the girl away from her aunt and von Lainz, anyway. Drawing toward him some sheets of paper, abstractly he wrote a brief letter to the company, telling them to buy all the poplar groves they found offered for sale; and watch to see what birds nest in the poplars, he added in an additional paragraph. Months later he smiled when Carrington in the company's office called his attention to the sentence. "You had us stumped with that stuff about the birds, Renfrew. But we decided you meant to look out for woodpeckers."

"Yes! Something like that," he answered quietly.

The hours passed uneventfully, save for a brief encounter between Soscha and Victor when the former discovered the young man busy with his affairs. Soscha had risen early and had been driven to Mass, having learned from Sir Alfred that there was a church in the village. Returning she found none of the party downstairs excepting Victor, with a fair amount of papers and correspondence spread out before him on the library table. Soscha stood in the doorway.

"You've not been to Mass, young man?" she asked. "I didn't see you in the little church."

"I beg your pardon," Victor said, looking up and rising quickly. "No, Madame, I've not been at church at all. I've been rather a heathen, I'm afraid, catching up on some business details."

Whereupon Soscha ejaculated, "Business?" in a frigid tone. "Pray, don't let me disturb you!" said she, going

out abruptly. Such attention to financial affairs, even as an exceptional thing, would be praiseworthy in Otto; but in this young barbarian from the wild western continent it was only a glaring instance of lack of religion. Soscha had a whole commandment to fortify her indignation against Victor.

The afternoon was clear and bright and Sir Alfred announced that the punts were ready on the river, two of them gay with cushions and rugs and supplied with well-filled tea baskets. After some discussion the Hon. Alice, Olga, Otto, and Victor were settled in one boat, while Soscha had coaxed Sir Alfred to take her out in the other. Alix, rather nastily, Sir Alfred thought, decided at the last minute, after he was caught with the Countess and couldn't get away, that she'd not go; she had some calls that really should be made. From the little wharf with Malcom Fitzhugh, whom she had invited to stay with her, she waved them off. "Don't stay too long past tea-time!" she warned gaily, laughing to herself at the contrast between Soscha's complacency and Sir Alfred's illy-concealed distress.

In the other boat Victor was being allowed to do all the punting. The girls were settled together facing the bow, while Otto sat opposite. Poor Victor saw only two floppy straw hats when he was not looking at the river, a view which was spoiled for him because Otto came always within the line of his vision. However, being nothing of a quitter, he decided to do his best to monopolize the conversation, even if he had to resort to "ballyhooing." He steered the punt up in the general direction of Strawberry Hill, leaving behind Sir Alfred's craft, shooting

rapidly across to Richmond. The Countess Hohenwald was in for a short ride.

"I'm going to be the model guide," Victor announced cheerfully. "I shall leave nothing unsaid, and when we return you'll be able to astonish the rest with your new learning." They were slipping past Eel-Pie Island and coming abreast of Alexander Pope's villa, or rather the towered building which replaced the author's home and the famed subterraneous grotto with its magic mirrors, pride of his heart. "I hate to do it," muttered Victor to himself, "but I'll not let that musical comedy officer get out of punting and have the pleasure of talking to the girls, too." Otto had deferentially suggested that he knew nothing about propelling the boat and might therefore get them into trouble, and had been so suave that no one could disagree with him. Victor talked on and on, remembering anecdotes of the neighborhood from the time of Lady Mary Wortley in 1700-and-something down through Kitty Clive's time to the present. He hadn't realized how much he knew about the local history and legend. In vain Otto had tried to change the conversational trend, but Olga was quiet and offered no aid while Victor always came adroitly back to his self-appointed mission as guide. At last they came alongside a tiny green islet beyond Pope's villa.

"Let's stop here and have tea," suggested Alice Corn-
ing. "Victor Renfrew, I should think your throat would
be parched. I've never heard you go on like this before."

"You've never gone out on the river with me before,
good reason!"

"Once would be enough, if you're always like this," she yawned politely and smiled the sting from her words.

"I thought Mr. Renfrew's stories were fascinating," said Olga. "I've never been here before, you know."

"Mr. Renfrew sounded like a professional," Otto volunteered, with thinly veiled insolence. "Perhaps you run a tourist bus for pleasure over in your Canada?" he suggested pleasantly.

"Perhaps," agreed Victor, as pleasantly. He held the punt steady while Alice Corning changed her seat to sit by Otto, leaving a place for him beside Olga. Alice busied herself setting some things out of the basket and putting together the spirit lamp.

"Victor, will you light this, there's a dear," she said, motioning to the lamp.

"Let me," begged Otto. "I'm here just waiting to be of assistance."

Olga reached for the box of safety matches. "Let me help, too," she cried gaily. "I'll light the match for you, Otto." Two matches went out as quickly as they were lit, but the third she sheltered carefully until the flame was clear and strong.

"Be careful," warned Victor. "Don't set yourself afire!"

She looked at him, still holding the lighted match, until with a scant quarter-inch of stick left uncharred, suddenly handed the match to Otto. Obligated to take it in his left hand, he turned to throw the tiny flame into the river.

"*Teufel!*" he muttered, as it burned his palm. His quick jerk tilted the boat the merest trifle, but just enough

to knock off the ledge a small kettle of water the Hon. Alice had put there until the spirit lamp could be lighted.

"Oh, dear!" wailed Alice. "Quick, Victor, snatch the kettle before it sinks!"

Otto glared at Olga as he murmured, "A thousand pardons, Mademoiselle. I am clumsy, I'm afraid."

"Mercy! Couldn't you stand a little fire?" Alice retorted petulantly. The Hon. Alice wanted her tea.

"What on earth are you doing?" she shrieked at Victor, who was carefully pouring the water out of the kettle.

"We can't have river water in our tea," he protested.

"River water, nonsense! It was full of good, clear, well water."

"Nonsense, yourself, Alice! Didn't I just catch the silly kettle going down, the river water pouring in the spout?"

"Well! That settles it! You'll have to shove us over to the shore so we can go and get some more water."

"Of course! I don't mind. Watch those tea things," and Victor was standing in the stern pushing off across the stream.

On shore Otto showed signs of action and volunteered to go after the water. "Come with me, Olga," he said haughtily. He had a lecture ready for the vixen whom he suspected of having held the match overlong on purpose to discomfit him.

"Bosh!" said the Hon. Alice, beckoning for him to help her. "We can't send you two. You wouldn't know where to go for water. The Colonel'd probably spill it, anyway. I'll go with him, and you stay here to amuse Victor." Otto, realizing the uselessness of protest, gave his hand to

the Hon. Alice. The Countess would hear of this, however. "We'll not be gone long," said Alice.

Olga and Victor watched the two go up the grassy slope, the Hon. Alice clinging to Otto's arm with the bobbing lavender ruffles of her frock a pretty contrast to the green woodsy background.

"I hope she'll put him in a good humor," Olga almost whispered. "I suppose I shouldn't have given him the match at all." She turned to Victor who had resumed his place beside her. A roguish smile broke through her mask of concern. "Otto's perfectly furious with me now."

"You *did* do it on purpose, then! I hadn't dare hope you really did!" They were both smiling broadly.

"He was so perfectly horrid about refusing to help you push the boat," she said emphatically. "He deserved getting burned for a lesson. And that insulting thing about the tourist bus. What must you think of the Austrian men, Mr. Renfrew?"

"I'm not troubling about the Austrian men. I dare say von Lainz has been so accustomed to giving commands in the army that he doesn't like to have things taken out of his hands. However, if I didn't bore you, that's all I care."

"No! It was delicious and quaint to hear about the people who used to go up and down this very same river. It gives one such an odd sort of feeling. But how do you know so much about so many things? I think you must be a professor in a university."

"Heaven forbid! I'm just a grubbing jack-of-all-trades, interested most in paper manufacture. That's what I was doing in Germany, you know. Studying a

certain branch of forestry and making chemical analyses. But let's not talk about wood pulp and sulphites on a day like this. Let's talk about you and me! You're quite comfortable?" he asked gently. "Warm enough?"

"Yes, thank you. The sunlight feels delightfully warm over my shoulders."

"You wouldn't like a parasol raised?"

"No, I think not. This is quite cozy." She fitted the cushions into the corner behind her back that she might face him more directly. There was silence, but only for a moment until Victor began.

"Just a week and a day ago a girl came into my life as though she had been sent by the gods themselves. I've been with other people for years without knowing them as I know her. The first time I saw her my heart didn't say, 'I'm glad to meet you. I think I shall like you!' It said, 'I'm so glad to have found you again. Where have you been for so long? Why haven't you come sooner?' And all this past week, when my thoughts should have been most occupied with His Majesty's funeral, as I stood beside this girl in the palace or the chapel, my heart said to her across the distance, 'Just so you looked when hand in hand we watched the funeral barge of the great Rameses float majestically down the Nile' or 'So we stood on a high cliff overlooking the fjord and saw the flaming dragonship of Harald the Fair go forth upon its last long journey.' And my heart would cry, 'Sweetheart, you do remember?' for it seemed at times as though she must understand." He paused and Olga looked beyond him at the peaceful green meadows. What a poet he was, too, this strong gentle man with his firm chin and his blue eyes!

"So when I realize that I must soon return to the place I've called home, I want that girl my heart has found again to go back with me. I promise her my love and my life." Visions of the joy that liberty and love would give floated before her. She bent her head and as the delicate color came and went in her cheeks, he continued, "I have seen you the sovereign lady of my house, and myself waiting on you,—showing you in that far country all the things that are dear to me. Olga," he said her name almost shyly, "Olga, it's that I'm loving you so much. Do you understand?"

"Yes, yes," she murmured softly, turning her face away. He came closer and clasped one cool, strong hand over hers. "Please!" she whispered. "I must tell you. You value me too highly, for I'm nothing but a girl who's been searching all her life for freedom and happiness. I would only bring you my longings."

"I only bring you *my* longings," he replied; "but my longing is for you and your happiness. Will you marry and go out to Canada with me?" He was about to speak further when Olga, prompted by some instinct to glance over her shoulder, saw Alice and Otto coming along the shore.

"Ssh! Be careful! The others are coming."

"Promise me just this," he said quickly. "Come down to the little French garden for a moment while the rest are dressing this evening. I *must* see you alone. Only remember! I love you!" The words were a mere caressing breath, as Victor rose to greet Alice.

"What cheer, old thing?" he called gaily.

"It's been ghastly, really," she answered. "The first

well we found had been pumped dry and it was miles to the next one. Some of these places aren't open this year, you know."

"You've certainly worked for your tea, you two! Get in here and we'll be back beside the little island in a jiffy."

"Don't let's stir a foot without tea," said Alice. "We're all right here, and I'm dead for food."

II

Olga was unnaturally quiet during the remainder of the excursion, though she tried to be disarmingly nice to Otto. In her mind thought after thought struggled for mastery. Her heart was poised for flight,—would it be a swift, strong, beautiful journey into new lands, or must it end back in the old country after only a few feeble protesting flutters of the wing? She was disturbed at the poignant fear in her heart lest it should not be the former,—and yet how disloyal she would be! Vainly she twisted Otto's ring that seemed a circlet of living fire on her finger.

No one else was about when they returned to York House. While Victor and Alice moored the punt, Olga sauntered ahead across the lawn. She must think, she must think! And yet her thoughts were always in a circle. Otto overtook her near the house, and seized her wrist in an iron grip.

"Just a minute, young lady," he said hotly. "What did you mean with your little trick this afternoon?"

"Otto, please! You're hurting me!" Olga made an attempt to withdraw her hand.

"And what of that? You can hurt me, perhaps, and make a fool of me before the English girl, without having

to pay for it? I'm too wise for you, I shan't permit it. If I must train you, I'll begin now.

"Say you are sorry you gave me that match!" He gritted his teeth and tightened his grip on her wrist until she could almost feel the bones crunch and she thought it would not be possible to keep from crying out for the pain. "Say it, you little devil!"

And at last, to be free, she whispered, "I'm sorry. I really thought you could hold it without being burnt." With a nod of satisfaction he dropped her hand.

"So! That's better!" But tears were gathering in Olga's eyes and she broke away to run into the house.

Otto looked after her reflectively. "*Gott!* What a creature. It takes such a one as I to tame her, but it is worth the effort. I'd give the world to break that spirit and teach her not to think she can toss me aside like a piece of dirty gold braid."

III

In a strange turmoil of spirits Olga dressed for dinner. She had never before in all her life felt so miserably alone. Here was a decision she must make without help from anyone. Least of all, she dared not ask Aunt Alix, partly because she felt that Aunt Alix would only too gladly tell her to follow the dictates of her heart. But since the scene with Otto in the garden there was a new fear driving her on and on. Through dressing, she stood for a moment beside the bureau, fingering the enameled locket on its silver chain. "Promise me you will wear it always?" a voice came back to her through the silence. He had known well enough what she meant when she had said, "I should

want to wear it always." What he had told her this afternoon left the next step entirely for her. He would be waiting in the French garden,—and after that,—the swift, strong, beautiful flight? She fastened the locket resolutely about her throat, and turned to go down stairs.

Out in the dusk of the garden Victor was waiting. Now it would be, or never! Would love strengthen the heart of this girl, his little bird of passage whose wings had once been so sadly bruised? If she would trust herself to him, vowed Victor silently, looking up at the pale evening sky where a few faint stars glowed, he would cherish her with his life, even as he had told her. But even he could not tell her in words what years of love would bring. He walked softly up and down one of the narrow paths, and suddenly at a turn saw her before him in the way, her gown a blur of light color in the shadows. They stood silent for an instant, face to face.

"You see, I have come to you," Olga said at last, and faintly. Victor stepped toward her.

"I wanted to tell you," he began, haltingly; but at the sense of her nearness a wave of emotion smothered the words in his throat. Another step and his arms were about her, his lips crushed against hers. With the perfume of the night mingled the fragrance of her hair and the intangible sweetness of herself. "Beloved," he said, holding her away that he might look into her eyes with his own radiant with a smiling tenderness.

"You look at me as though I already belonged to you," she whispered, pouting her lips in a half-smile, her eyes opening widely upon him. The hour had come. She had followed her heart, beating so wildly now; and this was

love! Shyly she looked up at him once more before her eyes closed for his kiss.

Victor threw his head back and softly laughed his joy to the skies.

"Oh, you wonder of the world!" he cried, and took her to his heart.

CHAPTER IX

I

THROUGH the exercise of a great deal of self-control, Victor and Olga survived the ordeal of dinner that evening. Victor had told her before they left the garden that he would see Lady Middleton and Sir Alfred at the first opportunity, and the necessity for careful manoeuvring gave them both a steadying thought. Yet ever and again brown eyes and blue sought each other across the table for the comfort of a long, understanding glance; ever and again one or the other of two hearts beat faster at the sound of a voice already grown beloved.

Two others in the company noted Olga's preoccupation and had their own explanatory theories to advance. Alix had chanced to overhear the conversation between Otto and Olga, having come up by a garden path behind some shrubbery the moment von Lainz seized her wrist. Furiously indignant, Alix had listened, determined to go to Olga at the dressing hour, but not having found her had concluded that she was away by herself somewhere, brooding over Otto's brutality and its significance for the future. Hence the seriousness of her expression, though Alix couldn't quite account for the furtively tender glances sent toward Victor,—unless the girl entertained a hopeless fancy for him. Why could he not have come

into her life earlier, thought Lady Middleton, heartsick with the whole wretched business. But Otto's theory was more complacent. The little one had been properly reprimanded, even as he had said she should be, and with the anticipated result. He need not mention the more or less embarrassing affair of the match to Countess Hohenwald, since he had successfully demonstrated his knowledge of the proper treatment of this woman. Consequently he began a flirtation with Alice Corning, and pointed his mustaches more frequently than usual, thinking as he twisted the waxy ends that the quiet little Baroness von Kranz as he saw her now was lovely as any man could desire. Strange to say, a flood of compassion and regard as genuine as he might feel for anyone surged over him with compelling warmth, and even Otto had his moment of noble resolve, however late it had come, and however fleeting.

Finding that Victor appeared only for a few minutes after dinner, Olga wandered restlessly about the drawing room and as soon as she might, escaped upstairs, where she undressed and got into bed. How would this life of hers develop, she thought? What would happen now she had given her love to this splendid stranger? But he was not a stranger, she reminded herself, recalling the poetry of his confession of love, the thrilling call of his heart, "Sweetheart, you *do* remember?" Lying there in the half-dark, one hand tightly held against the lips his lips had touched, she knew content, believing that this lover of hers would in some way take her safely to happiness; he would be victor in fact, as well as in name. Then suddenly she started broad awake to find her Aunt Alix sitting

on the bed beside her and a soft light burning in the room.

"Oh, I'm sorry," she exclaimed, sitting upright and brushing the dark hair from her forehead. "I must have dropped asleep."

"Yes, dear," Alix agreed. "Do you know what time it is? . . . Half-past twelve, and no one else is stirring." She looked at Olga, smiling the knowledge to which she had not yet confessed. The girl, smiling back, was suddenly aware of the reason for this unusual visit.

"Aunt Alix," she whispered, "do you know? Has he—has Victor told you?" Steadily and bravely she looked at Lady Middleton, though blushes made her cheeks glow.

"You darling, no wonder he loves you," answered Alix, drawing close the slender young figure in its white gown. On one bare shoulder, slipped free of the sheer muslin and lace, she pressed an impulsive kiss. "Now I'll tell you, after you have read this note." And there lay before Olga her first love letter addressed in the characteristic writing she had already learned to recognize.

"Dearest," it began simply, "there is so much to tell you! My heart is fairly bursting with longing to have you know all that is there for you of love and joy and yearning and tenderness. I could write forever without telling it all. I can only say that I love you, how much perhaps the years will let you know. I wish I could say it to you now,—what Mrs. Browning, whose sonnets I shall read to you some day, calls 'the silver iterance.' See how it looks,—'I love you, I love you!'"

"But there is so much to be done. Lady Middleton will explain to you what has happened, and when you read

this I shall already be on my way to London. Do you know how I hated to leave you, even for this brief while? If you think of me, dear heart,—see how modestly I say it,—*if* you think of me, remember that the thought of you is always in my soul.

“Good-by, beloved, until I see you again. All my love to you,—Victor.”

Tears came to her eyes, and for a while she sat gazing straight ahead conjuring up a vision of this man who loved her so much. But presently she turned to Alix, waiting with quiet understanding until she should have finished the note. “Victor says you’ll tell me what happened. Why has he gone to London?”

“He spoke both to me and to Sir Alfred this evening, my dear. It was touching to hear him, for I understand now that his mother is not living and the family connection is quite small and scattered. He loves you very much, Olga, and I believe he’ll always be gentle and kind. It was rather dreadful at first, I’ll admit, to think of you going off to Canada, but after all it couldn’t be worse than for you to go back to Vienna. I overheard what the Colonel von Lainz said in the garden this evening. He’s a beast!

“Knowing that the time is short, Victor—he’s asked me to call him so—and Sir Alfred have gone up to London to arrange affairs. You will be married before the Countess and Colonel von Lainz return to Vienna.” Wide-eyed Olga looked at her aunt.

“Aunt Alix, they can’t ever gain Aunt Soscha’s consent! She’d send me back to the convent. Please don’t let her do that! You know I’d rather die than go there again!”

Olga flung her arms convulsively about her aunt, who smoothed her hair and murmured, "There, there, darling! We'll take care of all that. The only question is whether you love the boy well enough to go across the sea with him."

"There isn't anyone in the world so wonderful. I'd go anywhere with him if he wanted me."

"All right! And now you must promise me something. If you want to marry Victor, we can't have the Countess and Colonel von Lainz so much as suspect our plans. So will you let Sir Alfred and Victor and me take care of things, dear? Will you trust us to work everything out in the best possible way? You mustn't be frightened and you mustn't worry if we can't tell you every little detail, because there's so much to be done between now and Wednesday. We're expecting you,—Victor's expecting you,—to be the bravest, pluckiest girl in the British Isles."

"Oh, I shall be, Aunt Alix. But it will be so dreadful to have a secret from Aunt Soscha. I'll be afraid most of the time that she'll read my mind and guess what's going on inside my heart." Olga reached out suddenly toward a table by her bed whereon Otto's ring sparkled magnificently. "I leave the ring out in plain sight every evening," she said. "I wish a thief would break in and take it. Now I can throw it in a corner and say that I lost it." She raised her arm, but Alix caught it just in time.

"Darling heart," she chided, "don't do that. Can't you see why you should wear the ring now if you'd never worn it before? It will disarm the Countess to see it on your finger. If you left it off someone would be sure to

mention the fact. We can't afford to overlook a single tiny detail."

II

Monday morning Alix announced to the house party preparing to go up to London that their host had been obliged to leave by a much earlier train. "Sir Alfred wished me to make his apologies, and tell you that an unexpected bit of business made it absolutely necessary for him to return to the city. He was very sorry."

Soscha took the tidings ungraciously. "What have we always thought at the Burg?" she asked Otto, who was more inclined to enjoy the absence of the "Britishers," having noted that Victor had also disappeared. "English society has absolutely no finesse. And Sir Alfred calls himself a gentleman!" To himself Otto was thinking what he had known of certain houseparties elsewhere at which the host had only too often remained after the rest left to entertain a special "guest" who might or might not have been one of the previous party. Verily there were gentlemen and gentlemen!

III

To make up for lost time, Soscha rushed Olga to the shops immediately upon their arrival in London. All day long there were fittings of every sort,—suits, several cloaks, blouses, and hats; and between whiles when Olga was resting there were accessories to select,—undergarments, handkerchiefs, gloves, and dozens of articles. Soscha was determined to take her niece home with the most startling array of garments and outfittings that

had been seen in Vienna for some years,—in fact, not since Julie Auersperg, then the young Julie Dietrichstein, had returned with her trousseau from Paris. By tea-time, which found them at a fashionable boot-maker's in Regent Street, Olga was worn limp, and left with the most imperfect idea of what her finished wardrobe would be like. Little doubts were creeping into her mind and nestling there,—horrid little thoughts like maggots burrowing into a firm, rosy fruit to spoil its goodness. Olga was tired, and being so she began to doubt that even Victor could accomplish the task he had set for himself of surmounting obstacles apparently unsurmountable. From among these clothes she had been trying on might as well be selected a shroud, since all her hopes and longings would be buried if she could not marry Victor. Life would be a mockery without him, but she did not believe he could save her. All these beautiful dreams would vanish and Otto would establish his dominion over her, but not a dominion of love, such as Victor knew it.

Back at Middleton House dinner was not a cheerful meal. Everyone was tired and Olga moodiest of all. She had expected some word of encouragement from Alix or a message through her from Victor, but Alix had not come until just before dinner and there had been no time for conversation. Lady Middleton had put in a full day in the shops herself. Among other things, from the vaults at Mappin & Webb, she had obtained a string of pearls belonging to Olga's mother and which had been left with Michael about a year before the news of Marie's death had come when Alix was visiting at Pskov. She had taken the necklace to London with her, and intended now to give it

to Marie's daughter on her wedding morning. From Sir Alfred Lady Middleton learned that Victor had accomplished marvels of planning and arrangement and that he, Sir Alfred, had been helping. With everything considered, and the bothersome fear in the back of her mind that Soscha might suspect, there was small wonder that Alix was tired.

Despite all this, Soscha was a trifle suspicious of Olga's moodiness. Now that the time for returning was so near, she would have wished the girl to be brighter, even though her physical body had been wearied. Otto, who had been at Middleton House for dinner (on Soscha's invitation only) reassured her loftily.

"Don't be disturbed, my dear Countess, for the girl is a little balky. I understand women fairly well, and this one particularly. She'll be all right, once it's necessary to be firm; she might as well have her head now and be moody if she likes." Otto had dismissed Olga from the conversation with little compunction, having been more interested in the "settlement," which had not hitherto been settled. If the dashing Colonel was to appear before the world a married man, he meant to be paid well for the honor bestowed upon the woman he should make his wife. At the present time was short and nothing definite had been done. True enough a sum had been mentioned, but Otto was not one to accept anyone's word in such a matter; so he had a long talk with Countess Hohenwald and in the end had her assurance that the first day they reached Vienna, the transaction would be completed.

It was not an especially light-hearted young woman who awakened in Middleton House next morning. Olga

now firmly believed that all hope of marrying Victor, of going out to the dear little house in Canada with him, had vanished. This last day of her intensely eventful visit in London would be spent in going for final fittings with her Aunt Soscha. Little by little the new trunks at Middleton House had been filling, and there remained perhaps enough clothes to fill another. Wearily Olga dressed in some of the fresh new things, and wearily turned to go downstairs when her two aunts came in.

"Lady Middleton has been very kind to us, dear Olga," began Soscha, "and because this is our last day here, I have consented to let you go with her this morning. The fittings are comparatively unimportant, and you two can manage nicely, I am sure." Alix prayed with all her heart that Olga might not be surprised into the expression of too much enthusiasm, but to her relief, Olga seemed only mildly pleased.

"That's very nice, I'm sure, Aunt Soscha. Shall we see you at luncheon?"

"I think not. I have an appointment at Kensington Palace. After that Otto wants me to go with him to select a special gift for you. Isn't he a thoughtful young man? You're a very lucky girl, Olga."

"Yes, Aunt Soscha," answered Olga obediently. Alix writhed at the tone of heartless acquiescence. She came toward the girl now and bade her hold out one hand, into which she poured the faintly iridescent, and soft-gleaming stream of the necklace.

"They were your dear mother's," she said gently. "I wanted you to have them before you went away."

For a moment Olga stood looking from her aunt's face to the luminous heap of jewels, her eyes adream. But again she said nothing, save to thank Alix in a quiet little voice. "May I put them on and wear them to-day?" she asked, almost timidly.

Alix was about to consent when Soscha said abruptly, "My dear! How can you ask? When you're going for fittings you can't have jewelry around your neck. Of course you can't wear them to the shops. It's ridiculous."

"Give them back to me, dear," said Alix quickly. "Have you any objection, Countess Hohenwald, if I let her put the necklace on when she is quite through with fittings? It would mean something to her, I know, to wear it for a while to-day. Will you permit it, if I give you my word that she'll wait until we're done shopping?"

"I shouldn't mind. Surely, she may put it on when you are ready to come home."

On the way to Worth's in Hanover Square, Olga slipped Otto's ring from her finger and put it in her bag. "I shan't wear it another minute more than I'm obliged to," she declared. "If Aunt Soscha objects to having me wear pearls when I go shopping of a morning, I shan't wear diamond rings, either. Especially not this hateful one." Alix smiled and said nothing, bidding her time.

About half-past eleven Olga had just put on a trim-looking blue traveling suit. Alix's whim had been to see her completely dressed in the costume, even to the gloves and a smart little hat. "I shan't see you in these things again," she explained. But when, with a pathetic little sigh, Olga put her hands up to take off the hat, Alix

stopped her, "Wait, dear, just one moment," and from her bag drew out the string of pearls. "Let me fasten these and we'll be ready to go."

"Oh, I can't wear this suit back to Middleton House, Aunt Alix," protested Olga. "It's to be the suit I'll wear away after I'm married. Aunt Soscha would think I'd be profaning it to put it on before."

"That's quite true, darling. But you're going to be married within the hour. There's a motor waiting for us downstairs."

Wide-eyed with wonder Olga stared at her aunt, a cold thrill of excitement tingling from her head to her feet. With one hand she grasped the edge of a dressing table and steadied herself with the touch of hard, unyielding wood. Then it was not a dream. Olga looked down at herself, then at the reflection in the glass. Yes, she might go to him unashamed; but for the matter of that she would have gone in rags, imploring him to take her. "Tell me again, Aunt Alix!" she begged at last.

"Yes, darling, within an hour you'll be Mrs. Victor Stanbury Renfrew! We must get along. They're to meet us at St. Paul's down in the city. You sail at two on the *Justinian*. That's why we chose St. Paul's in Covent Garden to be nearer the docks."

"Am I to sail for Canada this afternoon?" Olga's eyes shone with delight. "How perfectly exciting! What *will* Aunt Soscha say?"

Alix's lips tightened. "Whatever she has to say, my dear, she'll say to me. You needn't think of that. Come along, now!"

In the motor was a huge box bearing a florist's label.

"Your bridal bouquet, dear," said Alix; "but you can't have it until we reach the church."

Olga sat quietly as they sped across Piccadilly Circus into Coventry Street. "Aunt Alix, you can't begin to know how miserable I've been since Sunday night," she said at last. "I didn't believe you could possibly keep Aunt Soscha from knowing about Victor and me."

"Bless your heart! I've half a mind to chide you with verses about 'ye of little faith'; but just remember that Aunt Soscha isn't the only person in the world who can make plans and carry them out, too. We mustn't congratulate ourselves, however, until you two children are safely aboard the *Justinian*."

"And by the way, there'll be a trunk on the boat for you with a fair assortment of things from this trousseau of yours. I'm obliged to plead guilty to having helped myself to a few of the new clothes. But you see, Countess Hohenwald ordered them for your trousseau and she can't very well object,—especially after you've gone off with them." A naughty little gleam of satisfaction and joy twinkled in Alix's eyes, as she patted Olga's hand. "Don't worry about clothes!"

"Why are you so kind to me?" asked Olga, suddenly saddened at the thought of leaving this kinswoman of hers. "I'm such a queer person." Tears filled her eyes.

"There, there!" said Alix cheerfully enough, though her own heart was heavy. "We can't have tears on your wedding day! Don't you suppose I love you? That's why I'm kind to you,—if you put it so."

Soon they were in King Street at a side entrance to the church where Sir Alfred and Victor were waiting,

handsome and erect in their formal dress. It was a tense moment when the four went into the chapel and stood at last before the clergyman. Through the dusky arches the faint murmur of the impressive service drifted in broken phrases,—“not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly—reverently, discreetly,” and so until the last benediction “that in the world to come you may have life everlasting.” Then Olga was in Victor’s arms once more, held close for a long kiss.

Tears were in her eyes as they turned toward Alix and Sir Alfred, who said cheerily, “Now it’s my chance to kiss the bride. Don’t be a stingy beggar on your weddin’ day, m’lad!” But in Alix’s arms, Olga sobbed unrestrainedly. The hours of waiting and suspense had been long; she was overwrought with excitement and the surprises of the day. With her face buried like a little girl’s in the laces over Alix’s heart, Olga clung nevertheless tightly to Victor’s hand, and presently the sobbing ceased. It was a tearful moment all around, with Alix frankly wiping her own eyes and Sir Alfred not above making a swift dab or two with his handkerchief. Victor was all solicitude and tenderness. But a distraction came when the clergyman ventured to suggest that they step into the vestry and sign the register, so there came sun after the shower, and congratulations.

“‘The groom’s gift to the bride,’ as they say in the States,” said Victor, drawing from a little velvet box a ring set with clustering, sparkling diamonds, which he slipped on Olga’s finger above the gold of her wedding ring.

"That reminds me," said Sir Alfred. "Alix, my dear, where did you put that box?" And there was in Olga's hand his present of a diamond necklace, the finely-cut stones pendant in a row from a slender gold chain. Alix's present appeared, too, a curiously designed bracelet of the small white stones set between narrow bands of onyx. "You see, we've brought the crown jewels for the queen," laughed Sir Alfred.

"You dear, dear people!" answered Olga, a quick sob catching at her throat. "How can I ever thank you? These wonderful, wonderful things!"

A new leather handbag for Olga enclosed a substantial sum of money. As she transferred a trinket or two from the bag she had been carrying, Otto's ring gleamed from the depths.

"Oh, Aunt Alix! Take this ring, please! Give it back for me and tell Aunt Soscha and Otto that I'm sorry if I've had to hurt them. The best thing they can do is to forget me."

Thoughts of the Austrians cast a momentary quietude over the group, until Sir Alfred, looking at his watch, said, "We've got to look alive here! If you don't catch that boat there'll be the deuce to pay."

At the pier there was no time for Alix and Sir Alfred to go aboard. The whistle warning visitors ashore had blown just before they arrived, so they might only stand on the dock and wait until the young people came out on deck above them. With heavier hearts than they dared admit they watched the beloved children, for so both older ones had come to regard Olga and Victor. All was well with them, Victor looking never so proud and happy and

Olga's eyes shining with love and joy. With her hand through her husband's arm she waved good-by until the steamer had taken them down stream and their faces were lost in a blur of white and black and the variegated colors into which the passengers were dissolved by the distance. But at least the parting had one virtue; it left Alix and her companion so disconsolate that they were in "fighting trim," ready for the encounter waiting for them at Middleton House. Alix's lips were set in a firm thin line and for a while she said nothing, her eyes wide with the effort to keep back the tears.

"Toffy dear," she said at last, smiling wistfully at the memory of those brief days at Twickenham brought back by the name, "wasn't it worth everything just to make those blessed darlings so happy? Just to know that love like theirs still lives in the world, in spite of designing and villainous countesses and noblemen?"

"Quite right, m'dear, quite right," he agreed. "But they'd not have been so happy if you'd not taken up the cudgels for them. You're their fairy godmother right enough."

"But without you here, I'd never have had the courage to resist Soscha Hohenwald, I don't believe. That's why I'm being cowardly enough to take you back home with me when the storm breaks. Though I'm ready for it, quite."

IV

And the storm did break in all possible fury. Soscha and Otto were having tea in the drawing room when the

other two entered, and noting Sir Alfred's costume, Otto said with casual insolence, "You're rather 'toggy' this afternoon, if I might be permitted to observe, as you Britishers say."

"Haw! Yes," answered Sir Alfred, quietly. "Been officiatin' at a weddin'. Just been seein' the bride and groom off. Dare say you've been studyin' up quite a bit on weddin's and that sort of thing, what?" Otto laughed indulgently.

"Has Olga gone to her room, Lady Middleton, without stopping in to speak to me?" inquired Soscha.

"No, she's not in her room," replied the other, meaningful repression in her tone.

Soscha's eyes narrowed and their pupils contracted until only the steely blue showed through the lids. "May I trouble you to ask where she is, then?" Her voice was chilly and polite, for Soscha scented danger.

"At this moment I have every reason to believe that Mrs. Renfrew is a passenger aboard the *Justinian*, which must be some little distance toward the sea by now." Alix looked steadily at Soscha and Sir Alfred's sharp eyes roved from one to the other of the three. Soscha stiffened as though she had had an electric shock and Otto put his tea cup down suddenly on the tabouret at his elbow. A tinkle of the impact of china against the wood sounded sharply through the quiet room.

Soscha was stunned by the news, but years of training in rigid court etiquette came to aid her now. "Will you be kind enough to tell me, please, exactly what has happened?"

"Just what you have inferred——" began Sir Alfred, thinking to save Alix. But Soscha turned on him like an animal at bay.

"You'll be good enough to be quiet," she hissed between her teeth. "I'll have the story from Lady Middleton, if you please." Alix drew a deep breath.

"After all, she was my little girl as much as yours, Madame," she said thoughtfully; "and I couldn't see her suffer. God only knows what you've really done to her poor starved soul in these past years she's been with you. If she had married as you wished, begging Colonel von Lainz's pardon, her spirit would have been quite utterly broken. For poor Marie's sake I couldn't sit by without wanting to save Olga. So when this young man wished to marry and take her away with him to a new life in Canada I had no choice other than to help her.

"They were married, Olga and Mr. Renfrew, in St. Paul's at noon to-day and they've sailed for his home in Brockton. There's not much more to say, save that I took the liberty of having a trunk packed with some of her new clothes and sent to the steamer."

"*Mein Gott!*" shouted Otto, suddenly springing to his feet. "If you were a man!"

"Von Lainz!" Sir Alfred's voice snipped the syllables crisply. "You needn't shout so. Remember that I'm here to answer for anything said to Lady Middleton."

"So I see," von Lainz sneered. "'Been officiatin' at a weddin'! You think you're damned clever, all of you. I'll show you that I can go out and get a woman anywhere I please in London! D'you think I've been wasting

my time, eh?" He snarled the question. "If Hohenwald here hadn't been so cautious about the settlement, I shouldn't have been as careful as I have. But I was a fool, I suppose, for committing myself before I had the money."

Here was another blow for Soscha, with her only ally thus brazenly deserting her. This countryman of hers after all was only the shell of a man. The girl's instinct had told her truly. Where then, was the use of rage and fury? If she must retreat, crushed and defeated, Soscha thought, at least she could go with dignity. Without so much as a glance at Otto, who stood with arms folded, tapping the floor with one foot, she rose.

"If you will excuse me," she said quietly, "I shall go to my room and pack. You may understand, Lady Middleton, that I cannot stay longer under your roof. I'll only trouble you to have a message sent to Kensington Palace.

"What you've done I should have prevented with all my power if I had known. I have my own reasons why the girl should stay in Vienna. I should have known better than to trust any human being so completely." She made no other reference to Otto's behavior.

They were all standing, and Alix said gently, "My household is at your command. Tompkins will see that your message is delivered at once. . . . If I could tell you how regrettable my part is in this affair." It was almost terrible to see this other woman so humbled.

But Soscha silenced her with a motion of the hand.

She wanted neither pity nor sympathy. "Good evening," she said simply and went out of the room.

Von Lainz looked after her, then bowed stiffly, his heels clicking together, and without a word either to Alix or Sir Alfred, also went out. The faint slam of the street door came to the two who were left.

CHAPTER X

I

DESPERATELY in love as he was, in the course of their journey across the ocean Victor had the joy of watching his bride change from a quiet, rather saddened girl into a light-hearted young woman, with an abundance of new dignity and loveliness which quite transfigured her. Withal there was an almost elfin charm that at times made Victor want to reach out and touch her to be certain she would not vanish before his adoring eyes. Everyone on the *Justinian* came to know the young couple and more than one smoking-room acquaintance of Victor's presumed upon the casual connection for an introduction to little Mrs. Renfrew. She was filled with curiosity about the ship and must be taken even through the kitchens, into the hold and the steerage, where she began a scandalous flirtation with a starry-eyed, grimy little Italian lad of three, to whom she subsequently delivered most of the huge steamer basket from Alix and Sir Alfred which the bride and groom had found in their stateroom. "Sparks," up with the wireless, let her listen in when Victor had suggested sending a radiogram back to Aunt Alix in England, and even taught her to click off "GM 73," by way of greeting one morning. It was also the first time that Olga had been among people who spoke only English, and consequently there began her adven-

tures with English and American idiom, such as her experiences in London had not brought.

So they came at last to the new world, steaming into the Gulf of the St. Lawrence and up the picturesque cliff-bordered river. At Halifax and Quebec, where they disembarked, there were short sight-seeing excursions, but it had been too early for the Murray Bay season to lure them further afield and Victor wrote to his housekeeper that they would come directly to Brockton.

Their reservations had been made for Thursday on a night train west, and with a truly English horror of haste and no intention of wasting time waiting for a train to start, Victor did not hurry to the station. His entourage now included a little Pekinese, Kwang Shu, who had been presented as a wedding gift by a friend of Victor's in Quebec. "Sleeping cars" like these were new contrivances to Olga, and when Victor suggested putting the dog and his basket in the baggage car, she objected prettily. "But the poor little Kwang must sleep, too," she pouted, with a smile. "He will be quiet in his basket. Please let me keep him with us. He's a wedding present, dearest!" Which, with a caress, settled the matter for Victor. But railroad officials were less tender-hearted, and when Kwang essayed the most gentle bark in the world just as the Renfrews were established in their drawing-room, a conductor, passing through, stopped to ask whether there was an animal in the basket. Wide-eyed, Olga looked from him to Victor, who answered that it was only his wife's little dog. The conductor might have comprehended the situation enough to let whatever blame there might be fall upon this young man for smuggling a

dog into his compartment, since it was fairly reasonable to suppose that in the seclusion of the drawing-room the dog would cause little annoyance to other passengers; but the misanthropic trainman had no time for sentimental exceptions to company rules: dogs belonged in the baggage car, and this one must go there without more ado. The casual fingering of a bill on Victor's part, and Olga's blandishments had no effect: dogs belonged in the baggage car. So Victor was obliged to leave the car with Kwang in the basket and go after an extra check.

"Don't be away long, Victor," pleaded Olga. "I should be frightened to be left alone." They said farewell as though he were going on a long journey, and Olga prepared to watch from the window and count the minutes until he should return.

Suddenly through the crowd she saw a little dog progressing sedately toward the car. It was Kwang Shu, nosing here and there, but always coming nearer and nearer. What if someone should take him? She got up and rushed out to the platform just as the dog approached, sniffing the air. "Kwang! *Vien!*" she called softly, and was rewarded by a glad little bark. "Ssh! Little beast!" she reprimanded. "You bark again! The conductor'll hear and put us both from the train. But where is Victor? Why did you run away?" Kwang only wriggled with joy and said nothing, so Olga smuggled him swiftly back into the drawing-room and once more sat down to wait.

Then, before her handsome husband could come striding along the platform, there was a noiseless turning of wheels and the train began to move. In a panic Olga started to

her feet. Had Victor missed the train? Was this to be a repetition of the Berlin affair, without the appearance of the gracious gentleman of that first episode? And surely it was, since town and country slipped steadily past and no Victor appeared. But at least she had Kwang Shu, cause of all the trouble, for company and for a while she practised thrusting him under the seat and covering him with the steamer rug to accustom the dog to such treatment in case a trainman should knock. Soon someone came for tickets and finding her without any heard her story politely enough and went off for a diagram of the car, to prove whether or not Mr. and Mrs. Victor S. Renfrew were supposed to be in drawing-room A. Convinced that her story was true, this more obliging conductor showed Olga how to order dinner brought to her compartment.

She missed Victor dreadfully; she worried about him and was afraid for herself, too. Principally she was afraid because of sudden consciousness that there were strange creatures on this train, great tall men with shining black faces, who went swiftly to and fro. Olga had seen a dark-skinned person but once in her life, at a court performance of "Othello" in one of the Viennese theaters, so her association of thought was not altogether quieting when these fearsome men were seen going back and forth through the car. She nearly died of terror when one of them came to bring her a menu card, but the genial conductor had been in the drawing-room and she felt that he would protect her. This negro was a waiter, it seemed, who grinned a great deal with flashes of shining white

teeth and deferential nods of the head, and was very friendly with the conductor. But Olga was utterly incapable of enjoying her dinner until he had been out of her room at least ten minutes.

It was growing late when she rang to have the dishes taken away, for she had hesitated as long as possible, dreading to bring the black man back again. Stiff and watchful she sat in a corner of the seat, one hand hidden in the folds of her skirt as she clutched a tiny little pearl-handled revolver, one of Victor's gifts. She hadn't learned how to shoot yet, but he meant to teach her for protection's sake when they would get to the little house in the woods.

"Tha'll be all, Miss?" asked the waiter, preparing to leave with his laden tray.

Olga waved her hand toward the door. "Yes, yes," she said hastily. "Go away!" He swung the door wide to remove the tray, and she looked beyond him, her heart contracting with fear. There was a long deserted aisle of loose-hanging green curtains and about half-way along a white-haired venerable old man climbing a step-ladder. The horror of it was that another of these black men appeared at the foot of the ladder, about to attack the poor old gentleman, who seemed to be scrambling frantically to get away between the green curtains. Needing to see no more, Olga rushed out of her room and down the aisle, flourishing the little revolver.

"Go away, go away!" she commanded, pushing the porter from the ladder. The old man, just getting into his berth, had one foot still on the top step when Olga

mounted and took hold of his shoe. "Come back," she cried, tugging at the boot, "you mustn't be afraid. I'll drive him away! It's all right! Come down!"

Astonished almost beyond words, the gentleman withdrew his head from the berth and looked at this radiant young woman frantically concerned over something. Heads were popping out from between the curtains all along the aisle and the friendly conductor also appeared, having been summoned by Olga's wild-eyed waiter who thought they had a mad woman in the car. "My dear young lady," the gentleman began, trying to be dignified as his collarless, shirt-sleeved state would permit. "What seems to be the trouble?"

Olga turned to the conductor, waving the revolver toward the porter, who cowered into the curtains and murmured, "Mah Gawd, Massa! Doan' let that woman shoot me! Mah Gawd!" his teeth clicking between his thick lips.

"The black man!" gasped Olga. "He was chasing this poor old gentleman up the ladder. I saved him just in time." From down the aisle came a roar of laughter as a stout traveling salesman collapsed backward on his berth. Even the old man smiled gently, as Olga looked about in bewilderment.

"I'm afraid you don't quite understand," explained the conductor, gently. "Custis, here, is the porter. He was helping this gentleman get into bed. The upper berth there, see!" He drew the curtains apart. "He's going to sleep there."

Now Olga's face, quick to register her emotions, filled with compassion. "Oh, the poor old man!" she said softly.

"He shouldn't sleep there! If he hasn't money enough let him have my drawing-room anyway. I'll sleep in that 'upper berth,' you call it?" And the conductor, looking up at the old man, who happened to be a wealthy M.P. coming down to Ottawa in haste and unable to secure better accommodations, choked with dismay.

The M.P. came down the steps. "My dear, gracious young lady," he said, "I presume you're a stranger in our country, but for all that I appreciate fully your consideration of an old man, whom you undoubtedly regard with the veneration you would feel for your own grandfather. I couldn't think of accepting your offer, but permit me to present one of my cards. If you ever desire a favor, pray feel that I am under obligation to you for your extreme thoughtfulness as much as though I had been able to accept a courtesy at your hands." With the engraved card in her hand Olga was chagrined and embarrassed, but she held her head up bravely. It was nothing of which to have been ashamed. "Now I'd suggest that you go back to your drawing-room and get to sleep. I have daughters of my own, young lady, and they shall hear how thoughtful a beautiful young stranger has been of their old father."

Then suddenly Olga was just a frightened girl again, who had made herself a laughing stock. She wanted Victor with all her heart, wanted him to tell all these people to go away and then, in their cozy little drawing-room, to take her in his arms and make her forget everything but how much they loved each other. "I'm sorry," she faltered, at last. "I've been very foolish. I think if you'll excuse me, I'll go back." She turned and went

quickly into her room and shut the door, leaving outside a little group of the curious, half-amused and half-pitying, wanting to know from the conductor who the little woman was.

Custis, the porter, chattered volubly. "Lordy, Mars' Tupper," he said to the conductor, "wha' di'n yoah take away dat rehvolveh f'um dat girl? Di'n yo all see how she was a-flourishin' it at me? Ah'm gwine be powerful 'fraid if she rings de bell any to-night." Whereupon the conductor had laughed and told him not to borrow trouble.

"She'd never hit you if she did shoot at you. You know how women aim!"

Olga had wept a little on Kwang's collar, more glad than she could say for the comfort of something alive and warm to talk to. The little dog wriggled at the touch of tears on his neck and in sympathy shot out a soft, pink tongue to caress his mistress's cheek. Then the conductor himself brought a telegram dated from a station just passed. "Following by first train to-morrow," it read, "will meet you, dearest, at 68 St. James Street, HOME, darling! Think of it! Love, Victor," said her reckless and extravagant lover. Thus assured, and thrilled to think that she was going "home," she minded not at all when Custis came in fear and trembling to make up the bed. When he had gone she went tranquilly on with her preparations for the night and was soon asleep.

Having left no request to be called everyone overlooked the fact that the young lady in drawing-room A might not have awakened in time to dress. Just before the train came into the Brockton yards, the watchful conductor

knocked at the door and was obliged to knock again before a sleep-filled voice answered.

"I beg pardon, Madame, but we'll be at the station in five minutes. Weren't you called?"

Olga said "Thank you," and tumbled out of bed in dismay. Throwing her things into the bag, she slipped a skirt over her sleeping garment, which happened to be a pair of pink pajamas chosen for traveling wear. Stockings went on, rolled over her knees, and shoes; her hair went up in a quick twist. By the time the train had been stopped for a few moments she was ready to go out in coat and hat and gloves, outwardly impeccably clad but no one knowing how sketchily dressed underneath. It was fearfully uncomfortable, going along the platform, Kwang brazenly tucked under her arm, whilst a red-cap took away the luggage toward a cab. She had a feeling that her hair was stringing in wisps down her neck and that her stockings were in sad danger of slipping, though in reality she was quite presentably smart-looking.

The cab-driver clicked up his horses and they went off through the streets. Composed enough to look about her as they went along, Olga could already feel the charm of this Canadian city which seemed a blending of old and new worlds. A bit of American business spirit and dash was infused into the soothing quietness of its distinctly English atmosphere. What one could see of the shops was English, the people on the streets, and the houses themselves were typical of England, yet there was a trace of un-English vitality surcharging everything. Naturally she could not analyze this at once, but gradually through

the days the truth came to her and she felt anew the breathlessness of an explorer who has discovered a wonderful world of possibility. How far, far away was the velvet and golden dust of Vienna! Past the entrance to Dominion Park, they presently came to St. James Street, with the university campus and buildings discernible beyond the right. No. 68 had a low privet hedge and a semi-circular drive that led to the pillared portico of a cream-colored brick house, lighted by broad windows which gave the place an open, friendly look rather less formal than many of its neighboring dwellings. But incongruously there was no air of readiness about it, instead a disheveled tidiness quite like Olga's own condition; outwardly it was a well-ordered house, but within there appeared to be confusion. As the cab stopped beside the steps Olga caught sight of ladders and workmen, paper-hangers and painters; great folds of canvas billowed over the hall floor. In response to her ring, a buxom, rather elderly woman came to the door, smoothing her apron at her sides. She opened the door cautiously, her eyes wide with astonishment.

"Is this where Mr. Renfrew lives?" asked Olga.

"He's not in, ma'am. We're not expecting him until Monday or Tuesday." The housekeeper looked appraisingly at Olga, who threw the good lady's soul into alarm with her next words.

"There aren't any rooms ready then?" she asked, and in response to the other's nod said simply, "You see, I'm Mrs. Renfrew."

"Dearie me!" breathed Mrs. Braxton, the housekeeper, devoutly. "Not the new mistress we've been a-dyin' to

see? Your pardon, ma'am! I'm that excited! And where's the master, if I might be so bold as to inquire? We were expectin' the bride and groom to come home together. The master's letter must have been delayed. The last we knew you were to come home by the third of June. Whatever shall I do?"

"I know who you are," announced Olga. "You're Braxton! I've heard Vic—Mr. Renfrew speak of you often, and I'm obliged to you because you've taken such care of my husband all these years. You were his nurse when he was a little boy." Braxton was obviously flattered and pleased. Olga continued, "I shan't disturb you at all. I'm going to stay in a hotel. Mr. Renfrew missed the train, but he'll be here by this afternoon. Which is the best hotel?"

Braxton was plainly horrified now. It wasn't right and proper to go and live in one of "them hotels" when one had a home to go to, even if the home wasn't in immaculate order. One or two rooms could be made ready in an hour, if the mistress would only stay. But no! Here was some of the freedom Olga had longed for! Besides, she didn't want the servants to know how incompletely she was dressed; it would be a bad first impression. Here was a decision she might make for herself! Off to the hotel she would go. "Queen's Hotel, you say it is?" Olga was down the steps and into the cab, followed by Braxton, expostulating all the way. "No, thank you, Braxton! Please tell Mr. Renfrew where I've gone if he calls for me here!

"To the Queen's Hotel," she told the driver, and went merrily off, leaving no end of consternation behind her.

II

She felt very grandly independent, registering in the sedate old hostelry, requesting a spacious suite and informing the clerk that her husband would join her within a day. The clerk, recognizing the name of Renfrew, tipped off the news to a young newspaper friend of his, and before Olga had been in her room scarcely ten minutes there was a call on the house telephone to say that a gentleman wished to see her. But after some confused questioning and answers she convinced him that Mrs. Renfrew had nothing to say to a representative of the *Sphere*. Olga had no idea what such a person was, but on the general principle of being a stranger in a strange land she refused, and later had Victor's congratulations for having shown such good sense.

By noon she was bathed and dressed and soon after luncheon had the supreme joy of hearing the clerk's voice announce over the telephone that Mr. Renfrew was on his way upstairs. Even as she answered the phone there was a knock at the door and while Kwang barked inquiringly she ran to meet her husband, with whom she must have, through the afternoon, many breathless moments of conversation and kisses over this dreadful experience which had separated them so soon.

CHAPTER VI

I

THE steady pleasant course of the next three years was marked by the arrival of three, or rather four, visitors to 68 St. James Street, each of whom left indelible associations and one of whom remained. Late in July, 1910, when Victor and Olga had gone to the little house in the woods, the first of these arrived, the only one Olga was destined not to see—the one who might have changed the whole course of the girl's life if the two had met. For Soscha Hohenwald, more broken in spirit than anyone could guess, had determined upon a desperate measure: at the cost of every scrap of pride she would follow her niece to Canada, and by what means she best knew, attempt to persuade her to return to Vienna. Soscha's trump card was not an offer of money, nor of marriage,—rather something that she alone knew and believed rightly would make Olga only too willing to go back.

Some lectures Victor was scheduled to give for the University's business administration courses, a new departure, had been arranged for the summer session and, much as he disliked it, he was obliged to come into the city at least once a week. It so happened then that he stopped at No. 68 one day, according to custom, to change from the informal dress of life in the little house to something appropriate for his afternoon lecture, and

from Braxton received the astounding news that "a lady who called herself Countess Hohenwald" had driven over the day before to inquire after Mr. and Mrs. Renfrew.

"Are you perfectly positive about the name, Braxton?" he asked. "And where is she staying?"

"I couldn't say, sir. She didn't mention."

All through the lecture Victor's thoughts were far away, and a nameless dread clutched at his heart. What did it mean—this rather theatrical appearance of Olga's aunt? Of one thing Victor was positive; he would use force if necessary to keep his wife with him: he had not saved her from that beast, von Lainz, for nothing. The Countess must be a devil incarnate to have come 'way across the ocean after the girl. Plan after plan revolved in his mind, but he could settle upon nothing definitely since he had no idea of the direction of Soscha's machinations. The first thing was to get back to Olga.

After some time the lecture ended, and Victor escaped outside to find his wife unexpectedly waiting for him in a victoria, with a thin, amiable-looking Scotchman who was also the Renfrews' gardener, in charge of the pair of bays. She waved her parasol to attract his attention, and as he came nearer, called in disappointment, "Aren't you glad to see me? It was so warm, even at the little house, that I thought you shouldn't be obliged to come home in a train. But you look as though you weren't pleased to see me!"

"Drive out along Oak Road, will you please, Mac-Iver?" Victor said to the coachman-gardener, and seated himself beside Olga in the carriage. The smile in his eyes and the tenderness in his voice left no doubt as to her

welcome. "You thoughtful, beautiful creature," he said softly, reaching for her hand. "Even now I can't believe that you belong to me, really and truly. You can't guess how much I wanted to see you. Perhaps that was why I was quiet when I first saw you—but it wasn't disappointment!" Again the distressed look flashed into his eyes.

"My dear, what is it? Something has happened! Tell me, did the horrid students misbehave?"

Victor looked intently at his wife before he directed a sudden question. "Would you want to go back to Austria now and leave me, dearest?"

"What do you mean?" asked Olga, startled as a fawn that scents danger in the forest. "My dear, of course I don't want to. Haven't I left all that for you who are my whole life? Why should you say such a thing?" A pause charged with tension.

"Only this—that Braxton told me this afternoon that 'a lady who called herself Countess Hohenwald' had stopped at the house yesterday to inquire for us." At the name, more potent than the old witch Baba Yaga's of those far-gone days in Russia, Olga seemed to go limp. The ruffy pink summer dress and the big pink hat took suddenly the appearance of a fragile shell within which life had shriveled and died. Into the brown eyes came fear that had been absent for many weeks. Victor watched her, sick at heart, nevertheless deciding that it would be best for them both to talk the thing out.

"The question is, my dear, whether or not we should see her if she comes again. Braxton didn't know where she's staying, though I dare say that would be easy

enough to learn. Without doubt she wants to take you back with her to Vienna, but before Heaven, Olga, I don't mean to let you go."

For half an hour or more they were driven slowly through the quiet avenues, sun-flecked and spotted with shadow from leafy branches arching overhead. At last they came down through upper St. James Street with their course fixed. They would stop for a day or two at 68, so that Countess Hohenwald might not be given the chance to trace them to the little house, too precious and memory-filled for curious eyes to profane. Then, if the Countess repeated her call in town, Olga should not see her, leaving Victor to dissuade the lady of any intention of taking her niece away. It was rather a concession for Olga to make, since in spite of herself there had been moments when she longed for the sight of her stern-minded relative. Alix and Alfred had both written, as gently as possible, of the scene in the drawing-room at Middleton House and Olga was sorry for her Aunt Soscha, even as she was angry at the revelation of Otto's rascality, though it justified herself. If only Soscha had been otherwise, how different might have been her welcome.

The interview came more quickly than they had expected, for tea had only just been sent in that afternoon by Braxton, who always had it ready on Victor's lecture days, when the Countess Hohenwald was announced. For one instant, Olga wanted to fly out to meet her aunt, but a glance at Victor, piteously and perfectly understanding the conflict in her mind, made her start toward the back parlor, and through it to her room. "Tell Aunt Soscha that I'm sorry," she whispered. "And remember to notice

how she looks—whether she seems to be very old.” Olga was forced to betake herself away at once, that Victor should not see the tears which would come, try as she might to stop them.

Then the Countess Hohenwald had been ushered in, and her nephew-in-law was surprised to see in her manner none of the old contempt for himself, but instead a great gentleness softening the blue eyes, and making her lovely to look upon.

“Madame,” he said, bowing low, “will you be seated, and may I offer you tea? The tray has only just come in. Will you honor me?” He motioned her toward a seat before the silver service. Soscha murmured a word of acceptance and sat down—a question in her eyes which Victor chose to ignore. When little matters of sugar and lemon had been settled, Victor, standing beside the mantel stirring his tea, brought the purpose of her call into their conversation.

“To what, Madame, may I ask, do I owe the honor of this visit?” But for all his bland words, both of them knew that he already understood the answer.

“Is my niece not in town, or is she here in the house?” asked Soscha directly, mincing no words according to her characteristic speech.

“We had both been away until this afternoon when we learned of your previous call,” temporized Victor. Soscha said nothing, looking at him steadily, waiting, so that he was obliged at last to relieve the situation of awkwardness. “We decided quite impartially that it would be best all ’round for Olga not to see you.”

Still Soscha said nothing, her eyes wandering over the

little drawing-room with its cool hangings of heavy silk to match the covers over the velvet upholstery on the big carved chairs. It was a home—this place where books and bits of bronze and glass showed appreciation of beautiful things. And love must be there, too. Soscha knew against her will that Victor had spoken the truth when he said they had decided impartially. Olga had not been bullied nor brow-beaten into staying away. The truth was bitter. She simply did not want to see her aunt. Soscha had come across the sea only to be defeated again, though she was in a sense unconquered, since she could still go back with her secret locked in her heart.

"Very well," she said at last. "I shan't force my presence upon her. I'll return to Vienna alone. Tell her, if you will, that her friends at the Hofburg are well.

"And how is she herself? Also well, I trust—and happy?" She said this last faintly as though it hurt her. "You love her very much, young man?" It was a gentle question, yet for a moment the old, indomitable Soscha flamed through the words.

"Yes, she is well," answered Victor. "And we are very happy. I've never apologized to you, as perhaps I should have, for taking her. But I'm sure it was for the best."

Instantly the Countess's manner changed. She was disappointed and angry—the sweetness gone from her eyes. Victor saw at once what he had done. She had meant to let the dead past bury its dead and he had dragged up the old skeletons. In some way he and Olga had made a mistake in judgment which could never be rectified, for the Countess seemed to have been definitely and cruelly

insulted. She rose in her most dignified manner, hiding the humiliation of her heart, bleeding afresh from all the little wounds Victor had ripped open. She had not thought it possible to have been so sadly distressed. Coming to them with a change in her own feelings, she had suddenly discovered that the impression of her retained by the young people had been strengthened in all its unpleasantness. All her life she had played a losing game. Her husband and her brothers dead—now this blood relative, the little niece with Franzi's eyes, lost to her; everyone on whom she had set her heart, save her son Günther in Vienna, had been taken, battle hard as she might against fate.

"It is a long way to have come for this," said she at last, slowly—almost against her will, rising and drawing on her gloves—a striking figure in some sort of thin summery black that made her blue eyes more blue and her gleaming hair more tawny. Victor had a man's inability to note costume details, but he was satisfied that she was well and looking unusually distinguished. He was sorry with all his heart that such a breach—hopeless of being bridged—lay between them. And presently Soscha Hohenwald was gone—out of the house and their lives.

From an upstairs window Olga, watching the carriage drive away, had seen her aunt and looked at the familiar figure with longing, remembering those other years when Soscha had first dominated her life, and she had been prepared for a passionate adoration of the older woman. It was sickeningly sad to sit there and see her go. It was so final, this separation, that to Olga it seemed worse

than death. She crouched in a big chair, her head down on her folded arms, and sobbed like a little child. There Victor found her.

"My own little sweetheart," he said, sitting down beside her on the *bergere*, stroking her shoulder with a queer little helpless masculine gesture. Olga reached out one hand to clasp his and after a while sat up, turning toward him and wiping her eyes.

"What did she say?" she asked. "Did she want me to come back?"

"That was the curious thing about it," he answered. "She didn't say why she came. After she found straight off that you were in the house and hadn't wanted to see her, she simply told me that she wouldn't force her presence, but would return to Vienna alone. You know we expected her to be angry and rather threatening, but she wasn't that at all. In the beginning she was sweet and gentle, more than I'd ever seen her before. Maybe you've seen her so; but anyway she was beautiful. And she'd quite lost that air of ignoring me as though I weren't even fit to be noticed. I can't understand it yet."

"But what did she say?" Olga smoothed one of the pink ruffles abstractedly.

"Not much, really. After that it was just to tell you that your friends at the palace in Vienna were well. Then she asked about you,—whether you were well and happy. She wanted to know if I loved you very much." A faint smile broke over Olga's face as she looked shyly at Victor, who must gather her into his arms and kiss her lips, her eyes, even the soft waves of her hair in token that the honeymoon had not yet waned and grown pale. After a

time he spoke again, ruefully. "That was what started her away."

Olga withdrew from his arms and sat up. "What do you mean?"

"Simply that after she'd asked me if I loved you very much, I tried to be polite and made a sort of an apology for having gone off with you. I never saw such a change in any human being. Like a flash all the gentleness was gone, and I saw that I'd hurt her. That, and having heard that you wouldn't see her, I suppose, was too much. I think we didn't realize how different her manner was going to be. I saw right off that there wasn't any use trying to help matters with talk. She got up after a moment and began to put on her gloves. 'It's a long way to have come for this,' she said in a strange forced tone, and then we both bowed in an awfully ceremonious fashion and she went out without another word.

"Y'know, I confess, the thing's rather got at me somehow."

Olga looked off into space. "I wonder if we should have seen her, both of us."

Victor got up abruptly from the chair, his brows knit in a puzzled frown. "No, I don't think so! You know how clever she's always been about having her own way. She probably counted on finding us a pair of sentimental fools."

He walked to the window and stood idly snapping with one finger at the curtain cord's ring.

"We've always got to remember how she treated you, sticking you in a convent for the sake of that puppy Von Lainz," Victor continued. "What's the Bible say about

leopards and Ethiopians? Not that I'm calling her either one, but I mean to say that it isn't reasonable to assume that all of a sudden she'd change into another kind of a person, is it?

"You didn't know what a pathetic little love you were when I married you, dearest. The Countess had absolutely squelched all your spirit. And I say, after all the risks we took to escape her clutches, we'd be a couple of blithering idiots to play right back into her hand again."

So they talked until the warm summer dusk closed around them, convincing each other at last that they had done the right thing.

"I wish we were going to be at the little house in the woods to-night," sighed Olga. "I'd forget so much better there."

"Well, why not, darling? There'll be a full moon and old MacIver knows the road like a book. We'll have dinner here and start back about nine. Those horses can make the eight miles in no time at all."

They were happy as only young things can be, throwing off their forebodings with ease. But many and many a time each wondered secretly why Soscha had come, and her visit was not to be forgotten, working like an insidious poison where they might least suspect.

II

By a year from the following August the second visitor had arrived—the one who was to stay—a tiny lad, with his father's blue-gray eyes and a firm little mouth that already seemed shaped for strong white teeth like his mother's. He had been born early in the month and was

brought as soon as possible with his mother to the little house in the woods. Alfred Stanbury Middleton Renfrew was his name, "miles too long for such a tyke," his doting male parent had declared. "But it will give him something to grow up to," replied his mother. And Victor had brought a funny, leggy, Airedale puppy, named Punchinello, who was to grow up also and be the boy's dog. Every boy had to have a dog, and not a lady's dog either, like Kwang Shu, "with respect speaking" for the sagacious Kwang.

III

For two years life went happily on before the arrival of the other two who were to complete this strange quartette. In many ways Olga had grown more mature, but there seemed certain limits of growth beyond which she might not go, since she possessed what someone has called that most lasting stamp of childhood—wonderment. Try as she might, there were many things to which she could not become accustomed. She had made discoveries in this new world which, one after the other, never failed to startle her. People were so queer, for one thing; even over in this glorious Canada, they took themselves so seriously. There were the devious ways of "society." For the time being she was absorbed in the novelty of managing a home of her own, caring for her sturdy little son, and ever watchful for Victor's welfare, but on those occasions when she mingled in society, she was impressed with a class consciousness altogether unexpected to her. There were lords and ladies in Canadian society, it seemed, who were the acknowledged leaders. Olga was

secretly amused at dinner parties and receptions to see how these people surrounded themselves, and were surrounded by others, with pomp and circumstance—to her mind entirely out of proportion to their importance. She heard from the gossip of the place that many of their titles were ridiculously new, and realized that the beginnings of their oldest aristocracy had come back in the years when families like the Hohenwalds or even the Alexandrovich had been powerful for centuries; it was all so pitifully comparative and she felt that this raw nobility suffered in the comparison. However, she was not one of them: welcomed, invited about, admitted to certain intimacies of acquaintanceship, but never entirely accepted—not having been, for example, a Coningsby, or a Hamilton, or a Gordon, of “the” Coningsbys, “the” Hamiltons, and “the” Gordons. Once she had been invited to a meeting of a “patriotic” society, so called, and had felt more insignificant than ever when someone asked her whether any of her own ancestors had fallen on the Heights of Abraham. Blissfully ignorant, she essayed a reply which highly incensed and offended her interrogator, who considered it “really too vulgarly facetious,” and the reply, spread about, had prevented the standing of Victor’s ancestors from making admission easy to the charmed circle. But of all this Olga was quite innocently unconscious.

The second summer after the baby’s birth, the Renfrews had a joint letter from Alix and Alfred, with whom individually they maintained a regular correspondence, to say that they were to be married in a week and would sail for Canada on their honeymoon. Would the children be

glad to welcome Sir Alfred and Lady Sidney? And would they kiss the precious god-child for them until they might see him with their own eyes? At this delightful news of course many plans were set on foot. The baby would be christened. There would be a series of affairs in Brockton. And then perhaps Victor and Olga might go west with the Sidneys for a brief trip.

"We shan't be wanting to interfere with their honeymoon," Victor had said. "But maybe they mightn't mind having us along for a while, considering that they're going on around the world and aren't coming back our way."

Victor's friends had taken to calling Olga "the little Austrienne," and this romance between her aunt, who was a Russian, and the English nobleman had interested society enough to make the Sidneys' visit a definite success in every way, for Alix and Alfred were as charming as ever, and seemed to have grown younger, if anything, in the past three years. Even Lady Pendleton gave a ponderous high tea in her big mansion on the hill—an affair and recognition which seemed mysteriously to furnish Olga an "open sesame" hitherto denied her. In this increasingly friendly atmosphere she developed afresh like a sun-warmed blossom.

After a month in Brockton, the four started for the coast, leaving Baby "Stan," as he had begun to be called, according to whatever perverse law of nicknames governs such things, in Braxton's charge. Olga had made Victor promise that they should not be away longer than a month at most, yet she was not a little guiltily surprised to find how the old thrill of excitement came to her, even when she was going away without the precious

baby. "It must be a force stronger than myself," she thought aloud, the evening of their departure, as she bent to kiss the sleeping child. Victor's name for her, first bestowed in the little French garden at Twickenham—"Bird of Passage"—came whispering back. "I am no longer that," she smiled to herself, "so safely nested here."

IV

Yet the thrill of excitement was curiously interpreted through an experience midway in their trip. No one else in the party considered the incident momentous in the least, but to Olga it was a revelation. For the party stopped one day at an Indian reservation out among the Western foothills to visit what appeared a little gem of a settlement, as they went down the gentle slopes of a green valley toward the little houses on one side of a swiftly flowing narrow mountain stream. Olga was aglow with excitement. During the time she had lived in Canada she had been fascinated to learn how this great country had once been the home of a noble and savage race of red-skinned people who developed high ideals of physical perfection and lived in glorious freedom close to the warm heart of Nature herself, taking their food and shelter almost as the birds and beasts. Often she had pictured mentally the existence of an Indian dashing over the green plains almost one creature with his fleet horse, truly a son of the prairies and lakes and mountains; and now that she was to meet these primitive beings she would find in them the personification of her own thoughts and longings. An Indian must be the embodiment of life

stripped down to its essentials, at the same time having those elementals beautified and strengthened by something generated in the soul through this overwhelming and intense love and knowledge of Nature. Going with Victor and the others over the forest path, she visualized a race of men who were the lithe copper-skinned likenesses of Greek statues—of women who were beautiful as Diana and maternal as Vesta; indeed a race of gods themselves.

"We're in a bit of luck, bein' able to see the reservation at fair time," said Sir Alfred. "Though this particular spot isn't so good as the reservations of the Cree further north, away from civilization more completely."

"What do you think we shall see?" asked Olga, with the quick eagerness of a child.

"Oh, there'll be sweet grass baskets for sale—wooden toys the old men whittle out, leather moccasins, bead work, and such things. Maybe there'll be a rope-throwin' contest, with some fancy horseback ridin', and perhaps even a war dance. How would you like that?" Victor and Alix were smiling at the enthusiasm with which Olga greeted Alfred's words. Alix had never seen any red Indians herself, but she was too happy and contented with her present state of general existence to care much about them.

"I want to race down hill," said Olga. "We're going along so stupidly and slowly. Let's hurry—I want to see the Indians!"

They were obliged to leave their horses with some others on the far side of the stream, crossing in a flat-bottomed boat pulled through the rushing water by two men stand-

ing at bow and stern and tugging hand over hand along a heavy rope. It was remarkable to watch how easily the craft was propelled, for all the counteraction of the current. Olga never looked to see whether or not these men were Indians. She knew too definitely that they could not be—dressed in shabby corduroy trousers and old coats, with soft hats pulled down about their ears. Had she not read that Indians wore little clothing, and that chiefly of animal skins!

Landing at a muddy little dock they went up a badly trampled path past a tiny frame shack flying the Union Jack from a pole in front, to a street that stretched a block or two from the stream. At the four corners thus formed were a few stores like those in any country town, and on the doorsteps lounged a number of men silently watching the strangers approach. A fat old woman, wrapped in a faded brown shawl waddled into a grocery store with a child clinging to her skirt. All the buildings were weather-worn and some of them seemed never to have been painted. Dust lay in tracks on the street, whipped up into swirls whenever a solitary horseman or, as now, someone in a buckboard came along. The driver in this case pulled his wagon up before the general store with a flourish of the reins and a prancing of his horses that caused dust to drift in clouds toward the visitors.

“Jove!” ejaculated Alfred, whipping out a big handkerchief.

“Oh, dear,” said Olga, “Let’s get away from this dirty place. I want to see the Indians.”

Victor asked the direction of the fair, and was rewarded

with a taciturn grunt and a non-committal wave of the hand in reply. "Off that way?" he asked again. "Come on, folks," he called, turning to the other three. "Down this street, I guess."

As they started, Olga said, "Whatever is that dreadful little town?" and was told, to her dismay, that it was the trading post for the reservation. "Is *this* part of what you call the reservation?"

But there was more disillusionment to come. A quarter of a mile further along they reached a clearing in front of a little church, gray-boarded and shoddy-looking like the stores, but bearing aloft a gilded cross on the roof's peak.

The clearing was fringed with little booths and tents, before which Indians and a number of white people, including two stalwart members of the Royal Northwestern Mounted Police, were walking up and down. At one booth a large group of men stood watching some of their number throw baseballs at a row of swinging wooden dolls hung against the rear wall of the tent. "Here yuh are!" called the man in charge, a sunburned, wiry person, violently enjoying a quid of tobacco. "Step right up, folks. Watch 'em throw the little white balls at the little white dolls. Look at 'im, watch that guy! A few more like that an' he'll put me out of business." An Indian knocked three dolls prostrate with as many balls thrown, and stopped to receive three cigars from the "barker." "Wha'didi tell you?" the latter asked of the world in general. "A big *seegar* every time he hits the baby. He hit Buffalo Bill on the nose an' he turned up his toes, an' he *never* missed 'im!" The concessionaire droned the

last in a nasal singsong. He had brought his "line" from the States where he had long since started his nomadic business.

For a time they stood on the edge of the crowd, listening to the man. "He's so vulgar he's quite funny, isn't he?" said Alix.

"The Indians are determined to shoot him out of cigars, it seems," observed Victor, noting the steady hits with a smile.

Whereupon Olga exclaimed in a startled voice, "Indians? Where are they?"

"Darling girl," said Victor, taking her arm as they turned toward a shadier lane of booths on the far side of the square where little Indians sprawled and rolled over each other like puppies at play. "What did you expect to see? These are the Indians all around here. They're charges of the government now and enjoy civilization like the rest of us. They're proud as Punch to be all dressed up in white man's clothes and live in houses."

"Aren't they free to ride about the plains, to hunt and fish? Haven't they any country of their own? I think these people are pitiful."

"You see, dear, they fought with the white men, wouldn't let them advance toward the west at all, so the pioneers simply had to take the country away from them. They hadn't any civilization, compared with ours. And this is the way we have to teach them. They have schools and colleges now and are given every possible advantage."

"Except being allowed to live their old glorious life," she finished for him sadly. Victor shouted gently:

"I believe you wanted to find the Indians tearing around in skins and blankets, with feathers in their hair."

"And why not?" she questioned, unconvinced that the old way was not after all the best.

During the day they "did" the fair in the prescribed fashion, buying some really stunning beaded moccasins for all of them, including a tiny pair for Baby Stan and some carved toys his god-parents insisted upon having. Dinner, or what went for a mid-day meal, was eaten in a structure, part tent, part house, where they were served with palatable stew of meat and vegetables, and a less successful berry pie for dessert. Two or three tourists who had come over to the fair ate in the same place, waited upon by stolid, disinterested squaws and younger women. Occasionally an Indian man looked in, grunted a few unintelligible words to one of the squaws and went away again. After dinner the four went out into the sunlit clearing. Alfred had discovered that there would be a war dance at two o'clock, and took the personal responsibility of getting his party there in time. They learned that it was not to be in any of the tents, but back of the largest of them with the grimy canvas wall for a background, and there Olga saw six men between the ages of forty and sixty, she verily believed, so wrinkled and withered were they, clad in trousers and coats of limp and stained deerskin. These were the warriors, and their dance was merely a sort of prancing about in a circle, the steps punctuated at intervals with a disheartened whoop or two that scarcely raised an echo from the neighboring wooden walls; at intervals, also, one of the Indians beat

with a stick on a tin pie-pan stamped all too unmistakably across the bottom with the name of a well-known baker in Medicine Hat.

Coming away from the "war dance," which Alfred admitted to have been more than a little disappointing, they met a big, strapping Indian in the black of a cleric and rightly supposed him to be curate of the little church. "I beg pardon," said Victor, stopping him, "but will you take us to visit one of the homes about here. My wife would like to see one. She thinks you should be living in tents and I want her to see what neat little homes your people have."

"With pleasure," replied the minister, speaking in perfect English, to Olga's further astonishment. And later she learned that this Mr. Dunvegan, the curate, had been graduated from a theological school in Montreal.

He took them to see Mrs. Wolf-with-a-Scarred-Face, who lived two houses from the church and who had just bought a new American washing machine. Several of the women had sewing machines by this time, but Mrs. Wolf-with-a-Scarred-Face was the first squaw on the reservation to own a water-power washer, of which she was proportionately proud. However, her little cottage was not immaculate, according to Olga's and Alix's standards of cleanliness: dirt had accumulated in corners and dust was visible in little rolls under a huge walnut wardrobe which shared honors of the parlor with the washing machine, conspicuously placed in the center of the room and decorated, since this was not a wash day, with a vase full of wild berries and grasses. Little John Wolf-with-a-Scarred-Face was rolling about the floor when they came

in, but at the sight of visitors collapsed into a corner whence he could not be lured, even with a shiny penny or a striped peppermint from Alfred's private store of indigestion preventatives. Mr. Dunvegan was obliged to expound the theory of operation for the washing machine, since the lady of the house was stricken dumb with awe and shyness before these guests in smart English riding togs, though she privately enjoyed the contemplation of Alix's skirt, divided in a strange fashion that made it seem to the Indian woman like a pair of trousers. Only last year, Mrs. Wolf-with-a-Scarred-Face remembered that Mr. Dunvegan had rebuked fifteen-year-old Minnie Broken-Tooth for going down to the post in a deerskin native outfit of loose trousers and long tunic; it was not lady-like to wear such a costume in public, yet here were these English, dressed like an American woman who had come to see the reservation a week before. Certainly civilization was a strange thing.

The guests departed soon after, leaving with Mrs. Wolf-with-a-Scarred-Face a gift of two shining dollars which Mr. Dunvegan explained to her were for little John's savings bank. It was growing late, so the curate walked back with them toward the four corners. On the way they passed a cottage where an old, wizened squaw sat with a baby in her arms. Clouds of smoke from the pipe in her mouth encircled her head, as she puffed steadily as a steam engine.

"Oh, look at that old, old woman," cried Olga, grasping Victor's arm. "Couldn't we take her picture?" They had used only one or two films that day, and this creature was truly a fit subject for a snapshot.

"She's a Wyoming Indian," explained Mr. Dunvegan, "widow of an old warrior named Eagle-Strikes-Like-Lightning. They came here from the States years ago, after Eagle-Strikes-Like-Lightning had fought in vain against being pushed further west with his people. When he was finally captured in the late '80's, they burned his strings of scalp locks and though he wouldn't show it, that really broke his heart. He asked to be sent away from the Black Hills where he and the remnants of his tribe had been taken. That's how they came here, and this is where he died about eight years ago. His squaw is the oldest one in the Province of Assinaboine. I'll speak to her and see if she will let you take her picture. She's usually quite cross to see visitors with cameras." He stepped into the little yard and spoke a few words in a native tongue, to which the old lady grunted in reply and muttered an answer.

"That's interesting," commented the curate. "She says she'll let the lady with the white teeth take her picture. First time I ever knew her to be quite willing."

"All right, Olga," said Sir Alfred, opening his camera and handing it to her. "Get a good one." Smiling with pleasure Olga approached the old woman who stirred not at all as she came nearer. But when Olga bent her head to get the focus, the crafty widow of Eagle-Strikes-Like-Lightning drew her shawl across the face of the sleeping papoose and ducked her own head. No one spoke, but they all knew that the picture would look like nothing in the world so much as a heap of old clothes. Civilization had not freed the squaw from native guile and wariness.

At a rather late dinner that night in their brightly-

lighted and comfortably fashionable hotel, they sat talking over the events of the day with some Montreal people who happened to be stopping at the same place. Olga had been surprised into expressing her thoughts a trifle intensely. "I am so sorry for them," she had said, speaking of the Indians. "I should think they'd feel that every white man is their enemy more than ever. I should be very bitter if I were an Indian." The rest smiled at the picture. "No, seriously, I would," she repeated, quick to catch the smile and looking to Victor, as had become her habit, to learn whether or not she had made some queer little mistake in idiom.

"My dear Mrs. Renfrew," said Caruthers, the man from Montreal, "may I contradict you, but you'd not have the least suspicion of a bitter thought toward the white man if you were an Indian. You might mourn the lost and passing glories of your race, it is true, but you wouldn't be bitter. Why, if you but knew it, the white man is spending his money to help the Indian fight his greatest enemies, for instance, consumption. He sends the young braves away from the reservation, gives them an education and work to do in the world, then he helps stamp out the disease which has attacked so many of the Indians left on the reservation."

"Ah, that's just what I contend!" said Olga triumphantly. "It isn't natural, and therefore not healthy, for the Indians to be kept on their reservations."

"But what else can they do? They're more like children than anything else in the world. When they were left alone they were always fighting with the whites, and drinking too much fire-water—though, perhaps, I should say

it the other way 'round. Both the United States and Canada have seen the wisdom of giving the Indians reservations to live on. It's the best way, my dear young lady; it's the only way."

Olga caught her breath and was about to speak, when she decided that perhaps it was unbecoming for a young woman to express views so directly in opposition to the words of this older man. She was silent, vaguely depressed and rebellious.

They said good-by to Alix and Alfred at Vancouver, turning their steps toward home. It had been a delightful trip, but for Olga all of its events moved before the background of that one day's glimpse of the Indians' life and the illusion she had lost. Would she sometime come to believe definitely that freedom was a matter of the spirit? Yet what would one say for the influence of environment? Surely these were questions not lightly to be answered.

CHAPTER XII

I

AFTER their return home, Olga and Victor took up the old life with increasing pleasure. "They wouldn't know me back in Vienna," she wrote jubilantly to Alix, for the time being at Bombay. "You can't guess how it helped to have you and 'Uncle Alfred' (isn't it funny to be calling him that) come to visit us. Everyone feels now that we have family connections as we should." Olga was thinking and speaking, as always, with her characteristic eager frankness. At any rate, the next year sped by on glamorous, golden wings of joy. There were social engagements of every sort, and the gradual establishment of a circle of very good friends with whom they rode and danced, dined and otherwise enjoyed themselves. Nor should the value of social acquaintance be discounted, for it was due to friendships thus formed that Victor was beginning to be mentioned as a possible candidate for the provincial parliament of Quebec, a first step towards something higher.

The summer of 1914 grew on toward August without particular event. On the afternoon of the fourth, Olga, Genevieve Rankin, and Lady Cornelia Pendleton were having tea on the veranda of a country club outside town, expecting their husbands to join them later and drive on for dinner at a favorite inn along the lake shore. Olga was feeling more than usually gay, and had been regaling

the other two with a narrative out of her past life, her first meeting with Victor on the imperial train, and the whole romantic story of their elopement. Cornelia Pendleton had been in London for the King's funeral, and was enthusiastically joining in Olga's reminiscences.

"Well, just what *are* you, Olga?" asked Genevieve Rankin, curiously.

"I suppose one would call me Austrian," Olga answered; "but myself, I think I am a citizen of the world! I look everywhere for freedom, and I do not find it."

"You've as much freedom as any woman has a right to expect," asserted Cornelia. "What would you do if you were married to my Joel? For the past fifteen years now he's known absolutely where I'll be from one day's end to the next. But for some reason or other neither of us seems to mind such a prosaic existence,—we're properly insular, I guess." Cornelia was fully ten years older than Olga, with a great store of inherent and acquired wisdom. Lord Joel was a jealously loving husband who lavished everything in the world on his wife in exchange for the consciousness of possessing her; and they made a striking and typically English pair, Cornelia with an elfin hint of Ireland in her gray eyes and dark chestnut hair and Joel with a trace of sturdy Welsh ancestry in his big frame. He appeared now as they talked, bringing Victor and rotund, jovial Harry Rankin with him. But the three men seemed a trifle more preoccupied than usual, and Joel flourished a newspaper to emphasize his words. The women looked up expectantly as they approached.

"Well?" asked Genevieve, presently. Each of the men seemed to wait for the other to speak.

"Haven't you heard the news?" inquired Harry Rankin. "What in Heaven's name do you women do, anyway?"

"We've been playing bridge with a dummy hand, and minding our own business," smiled Cornelia. "What's the matter, what do you want us to do?"

"You'll have plenty to do, I'm thinking, my dear," observed Joel, idly following Victor with his eyes as the latter crossed the veranda to Olga. "We've declared a state of war between Britain and Germany, that's all, and British troops are being mobilized for service in Belgium, and France has gone in against Germany."

"Oh, Joel!" cried Cornelia, sitting up in her chair. She remembered that her husband had a commission in a famous regiment "at home."

"Yes," he said, in reply to her unspoken question. "I'm sailing within the week."

An ominous and chilling silence fell upon the little group, so like other happy little groups the nation over. It could not be possible that the old, carefree life was to be interrupted. None of them had ever known war, save Joel and Harry, who had gone down into the Transvaal for a few horrible months, but each sensed that in some way this war would be more dreadful in proportion as it would shatter all the carefully nurtured ideals of civilization. At last Harry made a move to go.

"Come on, everybody! Don't let's let all this good sunshine go to waste! We're off for Reynaldo's and chicken and frog legs! It may be a long time before we all do

this again, and we'd better take advantage of the chance to play."

"Yes, let's get along and forget to-morrow," said Joel. Come on, everybody!" But it was just a bit pathetic to see Cornelia clinging to his arm during the evening, while the frigid Genevieve was even surprised into showing more affectionate interest in her spouse than she had in days before.

"The poor archduke," said Olga, during dinner. "To think that it was his murder that brought all this tumbling about our ears. Do you remember what we were saying about him only this afternoon, Cornelia? How handsome he was at King Edward's funeral, and how everyone was looking to him as a coming monarch of power?"

"And now Austria is our enemy," murmured Harry Rankin, wondering as he spoke why Olga Renfrew paled suddenly and looked at him so intently.

II

So the war came to Canada, bringing new organization, new activity, new interests, big demands and a noble response. Then followed the casualty lists and pathos of mourning dress worn with the dignity of royal robes; when one spoke guardedly, loathe to turn the barbed shafts of remembrance in fresh wounds. Within the first two years Cornelia Pendleton was wearing black for Joel, killed in the Dardanelles engagement, and the Rankins were both in England, where Harry, blinded by one of the earliest German gas attacks, was learning Braille and starting, with Genevieve's help, a hospital for soldiers blinded like himself. With all these changes had come a more un-

lovely thing, though it developed naturally enough,—fear of the unknown enemy. At home, for example, a little German shoemaker, apprenticed in the old country as a lad of seven and an immigrant to Canada more than fifty years ago, found strange people with hard, unsympathetic eyes visiting his shop and the English friends of many years' standing regarding him with coolness. An Austrian baker who had enjoyed fashionable custom for a quarter-century sat idle in his shop; there was no more "fashionable custom," parties were out of vogue, and even had this not been true, his wares would have been unsaleable. Suspicion was like some gigantic, threatening phantom, darkening lives wherever it was cast. After Neuve Chapelle and the sinking of the *Lusitania* in 1915 there were more distressing instances. A maid, whose grandmother, dead ten years past, had been a German, was a trusted servant of a prominent family, but unable to endure the covert thrusts of other servants in the household, suicided one day from the high bridge and crashed down in a bleeding mass on the bridle path below. Truly in those days hysteria and patriotism went hand in hand.

III

Olga Renfrew, some time the Baroness von Krantz of Vienna, viewed the war with mingled emotions. She had no sympathy for Germany, since some latent sense told her that the Kaiser's country had made a cat's-paw of poor Austria; yet neither had she much pity for cold, selfish Austria, and her tenderest regard was for Russia, struggling up out of darkness and chaos, only to be pushed back by the ruthless hand of Mars. Recalling

her childhood experience and her unintentional part in sending an innocent man to prison, she felt a vague sense of personal indebtedness toward Russia, and was definitely comforted to realize that she would have the opportunity, however indirect, to be of service through helping Canada, which had, with the other Allies, become Russia's champion. Olga wondered whether Feodor was dead or alive, in or out of prison; and how much Aunt Soscha was suffering.

Victor's mind was also full of unrest and keen shame because medical examinations had found him unfit for active service: a weak heart, they said, and farsightedness which would result in definite and dangerous eyestrain.

"It can't be true," he said to the doctor who made the first examination. "Man alive, do you realize that I've never had a day's illness in my life? How could that have happened with a weak heart? And my eyes! How could I have traveled through the forests as I have, living the life of a frontiersman so much of the time, and do my work at all with weak eyes? There isn't any reason why I shouldn't go, a great, strapping fellow like myself! It's a disgrace to fail Canada at a time like this."

But the wise physician, accustomed through days of such examinations to finding these manly fellows doomed to disappointment, waited until Victor had finished his outburst. Every day there was someone like this pleading to go; every day there were others, too, the cringing, fearsome ones, seeking for a loop-hole of escape.

"Steady on, old fellow," said Doctor Brent, soothingly. "Stop and think a minute about the very things you've said. Did you ever realize that perhaps you have what

they call 'athlete's heart'? Y'know you can't run your batteries forever without expecting the plates to wear. Of course you didn't think you had anything the matter with you. Under ordinary conditions you'd be good for twenty years more without a sign of a break. But now it's different, and these aren't going to be ordinary conditions. What good would your heart be in a charge out of the trenches if it buckled on you some night? What good would your eyes be if they began to play tricks on you and you mistook the color of a uniform early some morning when the smoke and the dim light combined to help the enemy? My God, man, you've got to think of England in this!

"Maybe the time'll come, Heaven forbid, when we'll have to take you fellows,—but not yet. Don't be foolish and do a younger chap out of his place in the ranks. It's hard lines, but it's your bit and you've got to help here at home. We need wise heads here, too, you know."

Victor had gone away, unconvinced and dissatisfied, to make the rounds of the doctors' offices in the hope of finding one man who would say he was fit to go. But the universal answer sent Victor stumbling out at last into the streets one night to walk and walk until midnight under the cloud-filled sky where fitful winds crowded mists across the face of the moon as these drifting thoughts darkened his mind. He had come home to Olga with a wearied body and a saddened soul, home to the woman waiting to comfort him and before whom he was not ashamed, in the black hours before morning, to lie and sob out his heart without restraint. This unexpected revelation had touched Olga deeply and filled her heart

with new love for the brave soul of this man she had married. She said little, since there was little that might honestly be said; but from that night a new and beautiful understanding grew between them that even death itself could not destroy.

"There will be something, my lover," she had said, "some way in which you, and only you, can help. And you must never say again that you are worthless to your country. It is you who have had to fight the first battle, against an enemy with whom you couldn't grapple in the flesh. You mustn't give up now. Think how the boche would be glad to know if even in these early days of the war there were many like you who had lost heart! And they would know it, too, *mon brav*. They would be quick to see it reflected in the men who fight in the first lines."

Even when Victor accused her of saying these things because she was glad he could not go, she took the bitter words in silence and only smoothed his hair and kissed his forehead gently.

"Of course I am glad to have you stay with me," she answered. "I shan't lie to you. But thou knowest," lapsing into rapid voluble French, "that, I, too, have pride which is greater than desire. And I have those things for which I shall always be grateful to Canada beyond words. Do you think then, remembering this, that I would keep you here against your wish? Ah, no! That thou knowest as well as I." And presently he was contrite, rebuking himself for this, too, which had been cruel and unthinking.

When he would at last admit that it was futile for him to attempt going into service, he sought other ways of

usefulness. Everyone knew that he had been found physically unfit for military duty, and because there was no doubting his valiant spirit, chances were given him elsewhere. Particularly his knowledge of business psychology and his winning personality made him a big factor in the management of loan campaigns occurring from time to time. Men going to war had reduced the forces in his factories and mills, but with what help he had the business of producing paper went on as steadily as possible. There were more demands than ever for paper-stock,—government demands which must be met; paper upon which to print the thousands and thousands of patriotic posters to stir the people in the loan campaigns, paper for other government leaflets, paper for the posters of other societies, paper that was wanted in the United States. It would be a government service if the pulp mills could be kept running. But amid all this, Victor found that he was suddenly making more money than he had ever done before in his life, a discovery which chagrined him deeply and made him frantically double his subscriptions to patriotic funds of one sort and another. The iron twisted in his soul as he was obliged to stay at home, unfit to give his fighting man-power to Canada, and forced instead to watch his bank balances increasing in proportion, it seemed, to the generosity with which he gave. Truly they were strange days of conflict in his heart.

Since Olga was known to be Austrian, she was not warmly welcomed by any of the war-work societies. This perfectly natural desire for precaution had made it awkward for her services to be accepted in any very important activity. She would have had no time, under any circum-

stances, with the care of baby Stan, for St. John's Ambulance Brigade or the Voluntary Aid Detachment which were primarily for younger girls, and for the same reason, she could not have gone into nursing. The Red Cross permitted her to work a day or two each week, but there were frequent and unpleasant experiences when some overly-suspicious soul objected to her presence in the workroom or canteen. So she was obliged to remain away from the busy centers of patriotic endeavor much of the time and content herself with knitting at home and complying willingly with whatever requests were made of her. Privately she suspected that some of the societies were repeatedly calling upon her for contributions simply because they knew that if she refused it would be an easy matter to say enough to bring her under direct suspicion at Dominion secret service headquarters, a *contretemps* she was naturally eager to avoid. In consequence, however, it was very hard to stay at home many days and be made to feel that she had no part in helping Canada win the war. Often she thought rebelliously that Fate had once more imprisoned her as surely as Soscha had kept her in the convent. But she had Victor, who trusted her absolutely, and baby Stan, growing to be a sweet youngster who looked strangely out of his element among the soldier toys Victor bought for him. Curiously the sight of toy cannon, tin soldiers, or a gray torpedo boat marvelously equipped to launch tiny projectiles brought some comfort to the man who could not get into the fighting where these things in life-size and form were grimly real, and matters of every-day association. At four and a half years, young Stan was being taught the manual of

arms by his father, who drilled with others of the "stay-at-homes" in St. Andrew's Rifles three nights a week; and there was no outfit in the child's wardrobe which gave Victor such a thrill of delight as a diminutive Boy Scout uniform with its tiny short khaki trousers and the woolen socks that came just below the baby's plump knees.

IV

With feeling running high about this time, when it was not safe for an able-bodied man to walk the streets unless his coat lapel bore some distinguishing button or pin to indicate his war interests and prove him not to be a slacker, a certain Eric Holt began to factor in Olga's life. Holt had lived in Brockton for many years, it seemed, and knew only the nicest people, by whom he was accepted on many counts. A clever conversationalist, skilful apparently in any game and always obligingly ready to fill out a foursome of golf or a table of bridge, he had been quite as popular with the men as with the women. Close to a dangerously and attractively indefinite middle age which lent him a valuable dignity, he was fairly tall and dark, with fine features just a trifle too small for a man; nevertheless, he was handsome and possessed of impeccable manners. His bachelor apartments on Sherbrooke Street were in their appointments quite out of proportion to the position he occupied as department head of a company dealing in coal, ice, wood, and builder's supplies of every sort, but popular fancy explained away this discrepancy with a pretty little story that he was possibly a beloved younger son who had escaped the traditional pursuits of the army or the clergy and had gone into

trade, and though his family disapproved of his choice, had thoughtfully provided him with an independent income. All of which, having reached Holt's ears through the customary channels of gossip, suited him to perfection.

Acquaintance between him and the Renfrews dated from the time of Victor's return to Canada with his bride, but it remained little else than a casual thing of social meetings at teas and dinners until the exigencies and grim humors of war created a different situation. Then Eric quietly but insistently repeated the fact, substantiated by medical statements, that he was over-age and unfit for active service. He appeared to be keenly disappointed, and consequently diverted his patriotic efforts into other branches, helping in the Red Cross and fund campaigns much as Victor and others were doing. He became so active in the Canadian Red Cross eventually that he volunteered to pay his own expenses on field trips to the various provinces in the interests of the work. Before the war he constantly left the city on business trips, and he seemed now to enjoy the opportunity given by these errands of service to get away for brief excursions. Thus it was that he came to call occasionally at 68 St. James Street, first for special committee meetings, then for tea, and finally on purpose to talk with Mrs. Renfrew; for he had arrived at the psychological moment when the strain of the times was beginning to wear down Olga's reserve force.

One chilly January afternoon Olga and Eric Holt were having tea alone together whilst the fine, powdery snow swirled in the gale outside and hurled itself unavailingly against the windows, through which the cheerful glow of

the grate fire and shaded lamps gleamed cozily. It had become an understood thing now for him to stop for tea at least once a week, beside other engagements he might have at the house with Victor. To-day, as usual, they had discussed the latest war news, which was scant, however, because continued cold weather had stopped fighting on the western front. Holt was always eager to talk with Olga about the war and seemed quite oblivious to the fact that she had so much leisure in such busy times. While they were sitting before the fire, a maid appeared to summon Olga to the telephone which had rung in the room beyond. When she had gone to answer, Holt sat rigidly still, listening to her replies and from them inferring correctly that some war work society member was calling to ask for a contribution. A piano, it seemed to be, and Holt smiled guardedly to himself as he heard Olga promise to have one at the appointed place; but his face was an emotionless mask when she returned.

She seemed to feel some sort of explanation necessary, and though she looked away from him out at the drifting snow, said in a dull, lifeless tone, "Someone from the Secours National, that was. They're having a sock fund bridge next week with a little orchestra of returned convalescent soldiers to play for them at tea-time. There wasn't a good piano in the building they've chosen, and they want me to get one for them."

"Interesting, indeed," he observed smoothly. "The Secours National is doing a big work in this city where many great and good things are being accomplished. It must be a pleasure to work with them." He waited for her to speak, watching her closely and meeting her quick

side-glance with a naïve widening of his dark-gray eyes that a moment before had been narrowed and keen like an alert animal's.

Turning nervously toward him now, she answered bitterly, "Why is there need of any pretence between us? Surely you know as well as a thousand others that I don't really work with the Secours National, nor any other war organization. I'll not even be welcome at this bridge party. It wasn't a committee chairman who called me then, just some obscure nobody,—because the chairman doesn't need to waste her time calling me. She knows they'll get what they want without any trouble." Olga turned away again, her mouth twisted in an agony of repression.

"Come, come, Mrs. Renfrew," Holt murmured. "You're not yourself to-day. This gloomy weather has oppressed you. I'm sure I can't think why you shouldn't work with the women, though to be honest with you, I *have* heard that you are of Austrian parentage." He finished the sentence with an exquisitely deferential rising inflection.

She stared at him in fascination. "It is a strange position that I occupy. The greatest love and happiness of my life has come to me here in Canada, but Canada, not knowing that, doesn't want me. I shouldn't speak so, but sometimes it overpowers me to think how virtually I am a prisoner."

"Oh, no! Hardly that! I'm afraid it's your imagination. In these days, you know, the people are all like children, frightened at shadows."

"You'd best be careful," warned Olga, in a flash of spirit mingled with irony. "They'll be taking you for a

spy next, on the strength of that remark." Holt laughed indulgently, as one does at the fancies of a child.

"Little fear of that," he boasted softly.

"But you come here to see me," persisted Olga. "That isn't safe, either. Who knows what fearful plot they may think we are planning?" Holt rose from his chair and walked over to the covered bench where she was sitting. Standing beside her, he put a hand on her shoulder.

"Pull yourself together, little girl," he said gently. "We can't have any of this. You're brooding over the thing too much. Don't let them get the best of you! That would be the surest confession of guilt. As they say in the States, 'Keep a stiff upper lip.'"

Olga looked up at him gratefully. "You can't know what a blessing you and your visits are!"

"Poor little lady," breathed Holt, sympathetically. "All this seems an injustice, a cruelty."

Holt stood a moment before the fire, looking down at the bright flames, his hands behind his back. "Well, I'll tell you something new and interesting, to change the subject," he announced cheerily, at last. "I'm going to run down to Halifax within a week, and rush along some shipments of coal I'm getting through for the Cliffden munitions factory. I take genuine pride in knowing I'll be able to get fuel to them when all the other companies are unable to obtain any. Shipping is a bit congested, but aside from that, I've not had the slightest difficulty getting coal."

"That's splendid," agreed Olga, smiling at him. "A day like this makes one realize that even a prosaic thing like buying coal is a patriotic service, *n'est-ce pas?* But

speaking of coal and munitions, reminds me of something I heard at dinner one evening last week.

"We were at Mordyke's and I happened to be sitting between Mr. Houghton, who's an insurance man, isn't he, and Mr. Jenks."

"Jenks of the Cliffden Company?" asked Holt, sharply.

"Yes," replied Olga. "Someone had mentioned the continued output of big guns in Germany, in spite of the fact that nickel steel is necessary. We'd been talking about the Somme drive, I guess. And suddenly Mr. Jenks said quietly, 'And you'll remember that Canada controls the nickel market.'"

"It was the most curious thing to see how all the people who'd overheard him stopped talking to listen. His tone was so ominous, as though he knew a great deal that he might tell.

"Finally Mr. Houghton said, 'What d'you mean? Is there a leak somewhere?' That was what everyone wanted to ask. Mr. Jenks looked at him peculiarly, and then glanced quickly up and down the table.

"It was a fairly small party with everyone there as trustworthy as yourself, so presently he said, 'Don't be surprised at anything these days, Houghton. If there's a leak, it's soon going to be plugged up.' Mr. Jenks picked up his wine glass and took a long, deliberate sip, as though to indicate that the subject had been dropped. In a moment everyone turned back to resume interrupted conversations and nothing more was said. It was very strange, though, and terribly mysterious. It left me with a cold chill, really, and I nearly died having to talk to Mr. Jenks for the rest of the dinner."

Holt had remained standing with his face to the fire,

and not by the twitching of a nerve did he move. "So they're going to plug up the leak soon," he asked quietly, as though he expected no answer.

"Yes," laughed Olga, "soon. And I wanted to ask why they say 'plug up a leak' when they talk about nickel and guns and steel, and mean catching a spy? It's such a queer language, isn't it?"

"Hm, yes, isn't it?" answered Holt abstractedly, absorbed in his contemplation of the fire. "Queer language!" A faint tinkle in the distance made him turn toward the room again, and he smiled in comradely fashion at Olga as the maid came in with the tea tray. "This is pleasant," he observed, without admitting how pleasant it was to forget munitions and steel and coal, though the back of his mind was busy with little plans and his eyes were curiously agleam. Kwang Shu sat watching until his scrutiny began to get on Holt's nerves; he could cope with human cleverness but not with this quiet little animal who seemed to have the wisdom of the ages back of his brown eyes. Like a grave Celestial he sat in front of Holt, looking so steadily at him that Olga noticed it at length.

"Kwang," she said gently, "you're not being polite. Come here to me. You mustn't sit and look at Mr. Holt like that,—isn't he queer?" she asked Eric. "I never saw him behave so before. But he's studying you; he thinks you're a wonderful man."

However, this subtle flattery was not so comforting to Holt as was the withdrawal of Kwang from in front of him. "Little Chinese devil," he said, under his breath.

CHAPTER XIII

I

LATE that night a train out of Brockton north-bound for the Cobalt country bore among the other passengers a stoop-shouldered man in a loose-fitting, rumpled overcoat, fur cap, and a pair of big, fur mittens, with his trouser legs tucked carelessly into the tops of clumsy looking goloshes. He appeared to be a querulous little man from the farm country, bundled in untidy clothes and peering out on the world from behind thick glasses. The car conductor seemed to know him, for the two spoke as he climbed aboard the train, and the former told one of the brakemen afterward that "old Grandy's aboard this trip." The trainmen were all familiar with his garrulously repeated story of his sagacity as a cattle buyer, and how he'd "show them slickers in the U-nited States that they'd hav'ta look sharp if they thought they were going to beat an old feller in the business." Grandy, he had said was his name,—Jasper Grandy, and he always left the train at Cobalt where those who cared to follow him might have seen him get into a rusty old model of a Ford and rattle through the town by winding ways and many turnings in a general westerly direction.

As usual, on this January day, he went on his way in the Ford, bundled on the driver's seat until only his round glasses like windows of a house showed that there was

life within the shapeless mass of coats and muffings. Through the town he went toward the west, but when the outskirts were reached he turned his machine into a deserted lane bordered by thick evergreens. Under the heavy, snow-laden branches he pushed the car, having first fastened a pair of snowshoes on his feet. Consequently there remained only the tracks of the automobile's smooth tires and these blurry snowshoe prints. With an approving glance at the gray sky where a few white flakes were lazily drifting down, Jasper Grandy retraced his steps toward the main road, being careful to go between the automobile tracks. Fortune favored him and not a vehicle of any sort went past. Back in the beaten thoroughfare, he unlatched the snowshoes and making sure that the road was clear, walked a few rods toward town and at last thrust the shoes deep under another evergreen close beside the road which he could reach without making tell-tale marks in the snow. Then he continued walking in the same direction. Minutes passed and at last a car came up behind him, slowing and stopping as he stepped dejectedly aside to let it pass.

"Hi, stranger! Want a lift?" called the driver, a red-faced young farmer, bundled in furs. "Kinda cold to be hoofin' it 'way out here. Get in if you wanta." Jasper Grandy's piercing eyes behind the thick glasses gave the other a queer, uncanny feeling not in any way relieved by the acceptance of his offer to ride.

"Thank you," Jasper Grandy had said, getting into the car.

"Goin' far," began the driver, determined to dispel the oppressive fear.

"To the station," said Jasper Grandy, in a voice the trainmen would not have known for its quiet even tones. The driver gave him a quick glance. He knew all the houses along the way, and knew as well that this mysterious person belonged in none of them.

"I'm a traveling salesman," volunteered Grandy, in Eric Holt's voice. "My run is entirely in the cities, and whenever I can I get out into the country to walk. This afternoon the bus man from the hotel drove me out and at my request dropped me about two miles beyond here. I meant to walk clear into town, but it's getting dark sooner than I expected. I shall be obliged for the ride." Encouraged at this explanation, the driver was about to put another question when he caught the stranger's eyes full upon him with their cold, impersonal stare so that the words stuck in his throat and his tongue seemed to swell at the roots. All the way in the two rode in silence, and at last the car was drawn up in front of the railroad station. The poor farmer lad had no errand in the direction of the station at all, but some hypnotic power had taken command of his will and forced him to go on in response to the direction of the stranger, expressed but once.

"By the great horn spoon," ejaculated the young farmer when he was safely on his way from the depot, "I'll bet I had the devil ridin' with me. Them eyes'd give Sir Douglas Haig the nightmare." The farmer had done his bit in France, where he had left two toes of his left foot. He was a brave fellow, but as he declared later, "I was plumb scared to turn my back on him and drive away, for fear he'd pump me full of lead, or conjure up

an explosion in the road, or somethin'. Gosh, it was awful! I'm cured o'pickin' up people on the road."

Meanwhile Jasper Grandy had walked through the station and out of a side door to the street whence he had started in his little Ford. Across the way a sign announced a branch office of the Kinsolving Packing Company and through its doorway he entered a big room full of desks and typewriter tables, where a staff of five stenographers and bookkeepers were busy at work. One of the former, a girl in the late twenties, looked up as he came in. "Mr. Trent?" he inquired, in Jasper Grandy's own querulous manner.

"Mr. Trent," repeated the girl.

"Yes, yes, that's what I said, young lady," he replied, impatiently. "I don't want to be kept waitin', either. When you tell him it's Jasper Grandy from Owen Sound way, he'll let me in in a hurry." The stenographer went into another office, returning almost directly to say that Mr. Trent would see Mr. Grandy. "What did I tell yuh?" cackled Jasper in high-pitched, gleeful notes as he disappeared beyond the door of the inner office.

When the door was closed he and "Mr. Trent" looked at each other intently. "The lone pine stands," said Jasper Grandy.

"By the deep waters," replied Mr. Trent.

"Mighty winds blow," chanted Jasper.

"Still the lone pine stands," repeated Mr. Trent. Silence again, then the two on the same instant said, scarcely above a whisper, "*Krieg ohne Frieden!*"

Jasper Grandy sat down beside Mr. Trent's desk. "How many cars are ready to send out?"

"Ten," answered Mr. Trent. "Mattes were shipped from Sudbury a week ago, in addition to these. Fine stuff, too, with a high percentage of nickel in the ore this time. There was trouble with the blast furnaces here, or we'd have been able to have sent another lot last week. Had to say that the cattle weren't ready to be put on the cars. But it's all right, the mattes are all placed and the cattle on board by now."

"Well, it's not all right with us. Have the secret service been watching you?"

"Not any more than they have for the past ten months. What's the trouble?"

"I got a tip from a woman that they suspect a leak, and moreover, that it's going to be plugged up soon. You'd better let this be the last for a while. Send a cipher with this lot to Felixman in Buffalo that he'll have to be careful."

"Are you sure it was reliable information, this 'tip'? The metal is needed."

"It couldn't have come any more accurately. She's a woman whose acquaintance Eric Holt cultivated on just such a chance. He leaves Brockton for good next week anyway. The shipment of coal for Cliffden is due in ten days, and by that time Holt will have to be safe in the United States. But it means ruin for Cliffden, and all the new machinery for steel shell forgings. Herschel, at the plant, will time the furnace firings to insure the greatest loss of life as well. These damned smart Canucks need a lesson just about now. Think of the motors burned out, steel beams and girders twisted and tangled in ruin! It'll retard production for three months at least. It'll be

worth Eric Holt's position and the years in Brockton." Jasper Grandy essayed a grin of baleful glee.

"But this business about the nickel will be the devil to pay if we don't watch. This'll be the last time I'll see you for two months, maybe. I'll have to go 'round by way of Duluth at this time of year. It'd be easier if navigation was open on the Lakes and I could make it at Port Arthur, but we can't have everything our way. By all means keep shipping cattle to Buffalo, and in the meantime find some way of sending the metal through at the Soo or Detroit, if you can. You can always reach me with a cipher at Chicago. William Parsons, you remember,—and they'll make sure that I get it. The office there is in touch with me constantly."

Jasper Grandy came back on the train next day with the intention of helping Eric Holt leave town, but it so happened that at the station both Jasper and Eric ran straight into the strong arm of the law. There were no newspapers on the train, and Jasper did not stop to buy one as he went through the depot on his way to an obscure little hotel where he might take Eric Holt's apparel from his bag and return to the apartment on Sherbrooke Street. Suddenly a man in plain clothes tapped him on the arm. Jasper's eyes blinked dully through the spectacles.

"Might just as well come quietly," said the plain clothes man in a matter-of-fact tone. "We've got the drop on you."

"Got the drop on me?" echoed Jasper politely and a little incredulously, in his high-pitched voice. "Who d'you think I am?"

"Can that mystery stuff!" mocked the detective. "Can it, I tell you. We don't hafta think who you are, we know! And you can thank the service that we don't tell these people around here who you are right now. They'd string you up on a lamp post for your dirty tricks. You shut your mouth and come with me." Without more ado he led Jasper to an automobile waiting outside, and Jasper was enlightened to note that a fellow passenger was a man who had boarded his train about twenty miles north. They were taking every precaution, it seemed. Ah,—a man was innocent until he had been proven guilty, thought Jasper. Thank the Lord this had happened before the coal shipment came through for Cliffden! He was only worried about the outfit of Eric's clothes in his bag, and tried to leave the valise behind him, but the watchful "dick" sternly bade him bring it along.

II

At dinner time, the day Jasper Grandy returned to Brockton, Victor came home late, alarming Olga with his serious face. "Whatever is the trouble, dear?" she asked. "Has there been bad news from the front? You're worried!"

"After dinner I'll tell you," replied Victor listlessly; but when they had finished and at his suggestion had gone into his study, he turned to Olga, putting his hands on her shoulders, holding her so that he might look into her eyes.

"I want you to tell me the truth, dear," he said solemnly. "Was Eric Holt here two days ago?" Olga returned

his searching glance with a clear gaze in which it was hard to imagine suspicious thoughts to be mirrored.

"He came for tea," she answered, "just as he has been coming once a week for the past few months. It's been very lonely, you know, staying home so much. It's been a break in the monotonous days to have him come."

His hands dropped from her shoulders. There was pain in his face as he looked resolutely away, murmuring in tense tones, "God knows I want to believe you."

"Victor!" his wife said sharply. "What are you saying? What is it? Tell me."

"Jamieson of the Dominion secret service came into the office to-day. He asked a few questions and told me some things. I was for knocking him down, at first; but one doesn't do that with the service. Those chaps usually know what they're saying. And Jamieson knew that Holt had been here for tea. Did you know that Holt was leaving town that night?"

"No, dear. Not that night. He said he was going down to Halifax next week to rush through some coal for the Cliffden munitions factory, but nothing was said about going away day before yesterday. Whatever has that to do with you and me?"

"That's what I wish I knew. But one thing is clear, please don't see Eric Holt when he comes back. It will mean a great deal to us, I think."

Olga had had a hard day and she was tired. By nature she was a person of heights and depths in her moods, climbing exuberantly only to slip back further than she had come, which was a dangerous business. The steady-

ing years with Victor before the war had been invaluable, and were twice as desirable now that they were gone; she needed Victor's help as she had never needed it before, and she could not believe he was failing to understand now. The world had nothing to offer, yet it would take away this sole pleasure out of the old times, this cheerful person who came to tea and talked of the war as though he did not doubt her loyalty, and talked of other things, too,—books, and pictures, East Indian embroideries, people in general, people in particular, theories, theologies, a dozen sprightly topics. It was unreasonable to take this out of her life without an explanation. "Will you kindly tell me how I can avoid seeing Eric Holt?" she inquired a bit coldly, hurt by Victor's mysterious manner and its implications. "He's perfectly familiar with my days, and he'd know that excuses of being busy would be lies. I don't see what right you have to speak so of one of your own committee members. Unless, of course, some of the virtuous have been telling you what *they* think about his coming here to tea, or telling the secret service to tell you. I had rather supposed, you know, that you believed that I love you."

She sat down in the ingle beside the grate. Against the seasoned wood of the high bench ivory tints of her neck and shoulders gleamed above her simple little black dinner dress. They had been expecting guests after dinner, guests who came only for Victor's sake, Olga perfectly well knew. Kwang Shu, the wise, who had followed Olga in, sat looking from one to the other with trouble and sorrow reflected in his great brown eyes. All was not well

with the beloved mistress. Victor walked up and down past the inglenook. His wife's tone had been sharp and bitter. She was tired, perhaps, but she did not know what he knew; that the net was drawing close around Eric Holt to catch him when the "leak" which permitted nickel to be shipped through to Germany was stopped; and that investigations of every sort were crowding at each other's heels. Jamieson had mentioned Soscha Hohenwald, too, in an unmistakable tone, so that Victor had no choice than to wonder what foundation he had for his inferences. And now Olga was being unreasonable about his request. Yet if what Jamieson thought were true, she would have been more cautious and guarded, she would not have spoken as she did. Victor stopped his restless pacing.

"It's just this, dear," he said gently. "I want you to trust me as you never have before. You know perfectly well that I love you more than life itself, just as I know you love me. But we're all in rather a queer mood now,—the whole world, I mean,—and we need trust and understanding and love more than ever. *Will* you believe that I've not listened to idle gossip because I ask you not to see Holt?"

Olga refused to meet his eyes, and would not say yes or no to his question. Then presently the doorbell rang and they sat in silence until the maid came to announce an unexpected visitor, Victor's friend, James Rutherford. The girl looked strangely excited and said, "Mr. Rutherford is in a hurry, sir. Something dreadful's happened."

Victor, with Olga following, went quickly out of the

study and across the hall to the drawing-room where Rutherford, a man some years older than Victor, with a keen, kindly expression in his face and sharp blue-gray eyes, that missed no detail of what went on around him, came to meet them.

"Jim!" exclaimed Victor. "What's up? What're you here for at this time of the evening?" Rutherford was a newspaper man, on a morning paper, and usually worked until late in the night, or as frequently into the early morning. He had a copy of an afternoon paper, which he held out to Victor who stared at the headline in consternation.

"My God! The Cliffden plant? No, it can't be!" he exclaimed. "Look at this, Olga. There's been an explosion in the munitions factory. At least fifty girls injured. I hadn't seen the papers this afternoon."

Rutherford put a detaining hand on Victor's arm. "Don't read any more, old fellow, until I've told you a few things. You two sit down. I've something to say. That's why I came up here, in spite of the fact that Collinson called me in and put me on this story. It was my day off, but that's beside the point." Looking at his set face, Victor and Olga obeyed him almost blindly and sat down on a big davenport at right angles to the fire. Rutherford took the carved bench opposite where Olga had sat two days before when Eric Holt had come for tea.

"The explosion isn't the biggest part of the story," he began, "but that paper's the first extra out on it, and naturally it's played up. They've found since that not more than two or three were injured. But you see it

broke just right for the *Sphere*. The afternoon papers have had plenty of time on it, which is where the story concerns you. The *Sphere* assigned Dodd, their star reporter. Does that mean anything to you?"

Victor frowned a moment. "Dodd's never been very friendly to me," he said. "Of course he's too good a newspaper man to let his personal opinions affect his stories, but I've never met him without feeling that he had a grudge against me for something. In all these campaigns, when he's covered them, I've had an idea that he was waiting, waiting, wishing he might 'get' something on me. Perhaps it's a silly notion, but that's all I know of him. The other boys on the papers seem to like him."

"Yes, they do. But I've known him for years, and I think you're right about the grudge. I can tell you how it started,—from the most foolish little thing in the world,—but Dodd was always a temperamental youngster with very definite prejudices. It's marvelous to me how he can write as well as he does, and as fairly, when I know he nurses fierce loves and fierce hatreds; in his heart championing one cause and despising another, often for the most peculiarly absurd reasons. But he's been on the square in his work.

"However, I worked on the *Sphere* myself for a while, some years ago when Dodd was just breaking into the game. This was about the time you came to Brockton, Olga. They put him on the hotels, where he was straining every nerve to make good. Victor, here, has always been fairly well-known in town and one of the best stories

he could have contributed to the press was his romantic marriage." With a faint smile Rutherford bowed to Olga, who wondered where this lengthy prelude was leading them.

"It seems that Dodd had the first tip on your arrival that day, years ago, when a room clerk at the Queen's told him Mrs. Victor Renfrew was registered there." Olga and Victor exchanged glances, as Rutherford continued. "The clerk had described you, Olga, rather prettily, and both of them knew there was a good story lurking somewhere. But Olga refused to see the reporter and later Victor wouldn't talk either. In fact, that evening, if you remember, when Dodd cornered you, you threatened to go over his head to keep the story of your coming out of the paper. You had quite a set-to, I believe, and in the end he was so persistent that you did go to the m. e., Boothby, it was then, you know, and the young man was officially requested to forget the story; though there was a nice little scoop with a lot of human interest,—the bride and groom arriving by different trains and all that sort of thing."

"Get to the point, will you?" said Victor, abruptly. "I remember all that. I was pretty mad at young Dodd's tenacity. It would have been mighty embarrassing to both Olga and me if some fool story had been published. Later I gave out a simple announcement of our return, I remember. But what's that got to do with the explosion and us? Hurry up, can't you?"

Rutherford pulled another newspaper from his hip-pocket. "This is the last edition of the *Sphere*, with a totally new angle on the explosion story, signed by Dodd.

Go slow when you read it, and remember everything I've said." He handed the paper to Victor. Olga moved closer to her husband on the davenport to look on as he began to read. The headlines glared black and hard.

"SPY PLOT SUSPECTED IN CLIFFDEN EXPLOSION

**Cordite Found in Coal; Herschel, Fireman,
Arrested."**

Down the column, under Dodd's signature, was the story:

"Definite connections between the explosion which occurred at one o'clock this afternoon in the Cliffden Ammunition Company, Ltd., and the activity of German secret agents has been established by the discovery of a quantity of cordite, an explosive, smokeless propellant in use in the British army and navy, in a shipment of coal approximating 500 tons recently received at the Cliffden factories. Arrest of the head fireman, Peter Herschel, at the steel shell forgings plant, followed an investigation made upon the suggestion of another fireman in the gangs who first noticed a thick, cylindrical piece of the cordite in a shovelful of coal heaped into one of the furnaces prior to the explosion. Other arrests will follow, the police say.

"Upon examination, all the coal in the shipment was found mixed with rods of cordite in varying lengths and thicknesses, as though especially prepared for this purpose, since the charge of cordite for a revolver is not larger than a millimeter in diameter and the big gun

charges are upwards of five millimeters. Authorities at the factory will not divulge the source from whence the coal was obtained, but in a statement to the police, J. G. Jenks, general manager of the Cliffden company, said that this particular shipment was not expected at the factory until next week when two new furnaces were to have been put into operation. Mr. Jenks also pointed out the coincidence between this and the fact that the shrapnel shell plant on Silham Road was to have doubled its force of operatives next week.

"Herschel, the fireman arrested, was off duty when the explosions occurred, but peculiar orders which he had given to his assistant and reported by the latter after the catastrophe led to the man's apprehension. Due to a misunderstanding of one of Herschel's orders, the extent of damage and number of the injured were fortunately not so great as first reported.

" 'If all goes well, we should be able to resume our regular schedule of operations within a week,' said Mr. Jenks, speaking for publication. 'We are thankful that the damage to the plant was not greater and that no lives were lost. Perhaps it is an embittering thing to see one of Britain's strong arms crippled in such fashion, but Canada's splendid bull-dog spirit will predominate and in a few weeks this plant will again be busy turning out better forgings, if possible, than ever before.'

"This noble and cheery attitude on the part of the factory executives does not deter from the fact that a ring of spies is centered in Brockton. The police promise the apprehension of a leader of the ring within a few hours. He is a man fairly well-known in this city, where

he has lived for many years, and of late has been brazenly carrying on his dastardly plotting. Apparently he has involved in his affairs the wife of a prominent business man by working on her sympathies, which sympathies some say have been decidedly with the Central Powers, since her birthplace was on the Continent and not many years ago she was visited by a relative who is of the nobility in the enemy's country. Whether or not this lady has been accessory after the fact will undoubtedly be determined from the prisoner's confession."

There was more to the story, names and addresses of the injured and similar information, but Dodd's prestige as a special writer had enabled him to inject an observation verging upon the liberty of an editorial. So sure were the police of the capture of Eric Holt, alias Jasper Grandy, that the chief, who was a friend of Dodd's and indebted to him for not a few favors in the past, permitted him to write enough to save his paper from the ignominy of a complete scoop when the arrest of Holt might safely be announced late in the evening; and Dodd's own memory of Mrs. Renfrew and the beginning of her career in Brockton, coupled with rumors he had heard from friends in the secret service, made him dare to add the few bold sentences in the hope of forcing her hand if she was really linked with the sinister chain of events. Personally he firmly believed her guilty, and thought the stirring times and the circumstances of the explosion justified him in presupposing as he did.

When Victor and Olga came to the paragraph of innuendo Rutherford watched them closely. Having always felt the utmost sympathy for Olga Renfrew, he had long

since classified these spy stories as silly nonsense and was satisfied that the girl was absolutely innocent of any machinations against the government. She sat upright on the davenport, looking with piteous wide eyes at her husband. Through his mind a thousand thoughts were surging: Soscha Hohenwald's persistency, the acquaintance with Eric Holt, Jamieson's interview in the office. Holt must be the man the story hinted at. And *his* wife! It couldn't be possible. Rutherford, who knew the workings of Victor's mind, could be silent no longer.

"Dodd's overstepped himself this time, old fellow. You mustn't take it too hard, y' know. The mischief's done, and there isn't much that'll remedy it. We can make him explain why he dared write such a thing and let it get into print, but there'll be no good of dragging in names now.

"Of course it's obvious whom he means, but it's equally obvious to me, or any one else who knows that there isn't any foundation for his insinuations in the whole dirty business. Dodd's let his patriotism and his prejudices get the best of him for once."

Victor looked at Rutherford with glassy eyes. "Jamieson's story was like that, too," he said, dully. Blindly, gropingly, he put out a hand to Olga; faith and trust and love were battling against these other forces; and just this simple, little gesture was enough to send crashing in ruin the walls of Olga's fortitude. Victor was her lover; he must understand, else her heart would break under its load of sadness,—and thinking so she flung herself upon him, weeping in an agony of terror.

"Say you believe me," she sobbed, beating a clenched

fist against his shoulder, her face buried in his coat. "Say you believe me! The paper lies. I don't know anything of Eric Holt's affairs, Victor. Do you hear me? Say you love me." Her voice was hysterically shrill, cajoling, pleading, then rising to a high pitch of sharpness. Rutherford saw Victor put his arms about her, almost mechanically soothing her and caressing her brown hair, but looking ahead the while with that fixed, unseeing gaze. Kwang Shu came noiselessly into the room, having heard his mistress' querulous tone. He stood beside the davenport, perplexed, aware that something was amiss. Then suddenly Rutherford sprang forward with a cry on his lips. Renfrew had, on that instant, lifted his head quickly and his eyes widened with a bright, new vision. He seemed about to speak with reassuring tenderness to Olga when a shudder of pain brought him stiffly erect. As Olga, conscious of this convulsion, drew away, he tried to speak, but another wave of pain seemed to sweep him. With one hand pressed tightly over his heart and the other clutching at his collar, he gasped once sharply, tried again to speak, and fell back on the davenport, his arm relaxed and his lower jaw sagging.

"Victor!" shrieked Olga, seizing him by the shoulders as if to shake open the closing eyelids. "Victor! What is it? Answer me."

Rutherford was at her side, feeling for Victor's pulse and bending to tear open his coat and put an ear to his heart. But there was no faintly flickering sign of life. The shock and the struggle within his soul had been too much for a heart already weakened and strained by strenuous work in the past few years. The malady had caught

him, even as old Doctor Brent had said it might, suddenly when the heart was called upon for more than it could endure. "What is it, Mr. Jimmie?" cried Olga, grasping his arm. "Mr. Jimmie" had been her name for this friend of Victor's of whom she was also fond. "He isn't dead?" Her voice sank to an unwilling whisper that died into a moan as Rutherford, straightening up from over Victor's body, nodded in reply.

III

"God help me if that wasn't the worst experience of my life," said Jim Rutherford, later at the Union club. "To see that little woman having to stand those two terrific shocks, one right on top of the other was awful, especially when I'd been responsible for it, y' know, after a fashion. Bringing them the paper, and all that. And the baby,—little Stanbury's four and a half, or some such age,—wakened in the nursery when someone was phoning outside in the hall for a doctor, so that plucky mite of a girl,—Renfrew's wife *isn't* much more,—brought the chubby youngster in his little flannel pajamas, with a blanket around him, downstairs 'where papa's sleeping.' She held her boy up to kiss Victor's lips that were still warm and human. 'Say good-night to papa,' she told the child. 'He's going away from us for a while and we mustn't disturb him.'

"Gad, I thought every moment she'd break down, but she didn't. Where she got the strength and courage from, I don't know. It was absolutely the most superb and the saddest thing I've ever seen. When she came back downstairs though, afterwards, to sit and hold Victor's

hand, then she did let go. Sobbed so hard that the doctor had a patient on his hands all right when he got there. I felt an utter fool, I was so helpless to comfort her.

“But at least I’ve done something; I’ve had a session with Dodd and Griffith, who owns the *Sphere*, and they’re going to make it right. Griffith had met Mrs. Renfrew when she was a bride, and he was M. P. for the district. It seems that Holt confessed to the charges, but he swore up and down that he was working alone. He’d slipped up in his plan some way and the coal mixed with the explosive had been sent a week too soon. They told him about Renfrew’s death, and he broke down, swearing that he hadn’t ever meant any harm to Olga in spite of the fact that he’d been obliged to go to their house frequently because Victor was so prominent in affairs Holt wanted to know more about. So Griffith agreed to have a story published,—without mentioning names, of course, that will clear Mrs. Renfrew entirely of any suspicions directed against her. But the whole thing’s a sorry mess.”

CHAPTER XIV

I

DURING the days following upon Victor's death, Olga was faced with the question of life left undesirable. Never had she been so completely adrift, nor ironically enough never so free. In the room that had once been hers and his she was packing a chest full of Victor's clothes to be sent to the Belgians, and in some way the sight of these inanimate things, these garments which had acquired a certain personality of their own, brought again to her in a keen, rushing flood the sense of her loneliness. Cold rays of afternoon sunlight came through a western window and touched the folds of a gray tweed coat Olga had just taken in her hands. How poignant the feeling roused by contact with the rough cloth! She closed her eyes and thought of Victor as she had once seen him in front of the little house in the woods, practising strokes with a golf stick. He was wearing this same coat, and she had watched the firm play of muscles in his back as he swung the club. Even the heavy tweed could not fully conceal the strength of him, this splendid husband of hers who was gone. A faint smell of tobacco and wool. The same vague masculine combination of odors associated with his embraces in the daylight, out-of-doors, assailed her nostrils as she buried her face in the coat; but now there were no

arms about her, no voice to whisper love words in her ear, no hand to smooth her hair with gentle touch.

Alone! It had never before seemed such a ghastly word. In haste, lest sobs should overcome her, she put the coat hurriedly in the chest. One by one she picked up the other garments, determined to withstand weakness as best she might. Whilst she thrust them resolutely away her mind was busy with plans.

She would not return to Europe and Aunt Soscha; she could not even think of going back to London where welcome awaited her from Alix and Alfred Sidney. No! She was young and there would be no turning back just yet, even though she would not remain in Brockton. She had hoped to love the city of homes and tree-lined walks peopled with fresh young faces or aristocratic older ones, but after these dreadful days she could only regard it as representing a life far removed from her own. There was nothing to do but pick herself up and go stumbling on elsewhere. In these days of war everything was in turmoil, yet the thought came, "The United States!" Olga could not, for her little son's sake, go into war work, but she might take him and go to the "land of the free and the home of the brave." Was that not the phrase they sang, those Americans? "Free,"—ah, yes! She, Olga Renfrew, was quite, quite free now to do those indefinite things that had so often thrilled her to contemplate.

Last of all in the heap of clothes was a worn dressing gown. Intimate garment, recalling many a precious hour when two people had forgotten all the world but themselves and their happiness. Selfish garment, stifling her sad heart in its silken folds. No! That should not be

sent. No stranger should ever be wrapped in this beloved robe. Olga held it to her passionately, and even in this moment came a perverse imp of humor to whisper, "No Belgian would thank you in these cold, tempestuous days for a silk dressing gown."

Rising, Olga shut the lid of the chest and thrust the robe into a drawer. The sun had set and from the snowy dusk outside purple shadows were creeping in to fill the room. It was a week and two days since Victor had died. Again that dreadful word of mockery, "Alone!" The room was crowding down upon her, smothering her senses, and with one thought of escape, she seized a heavy wrap and ran down to stand for a moment in the quiet garden with the velvety sky and its spangling of stars overhead. There was no sound save the faint rumbling of a car in Wales Street and the hollowing beat of a horse's hoofs.

It was in this instant that the surety of Victor's presence came to her so definitely that it seemed as though by advancing a step she might actually touch him or feel his arms about her. Scarce daring to breathe, she stood motionless, her soul filling with exquisite comfort. He *was* there, she knew, trying to help her. She had never been more certain of anything in the world.

"Victor dear," she said softly, at last, stretching out her arms. "Thank you for coming. Help me always. Send me strength and guidance." A moment of that wonderful assurance, and the presence was gone.

Yet from that night she made her plans more serenely, for her sore heart ached less cruelly and she had the happiness one feels in knowledge of a sweet secret shared with someone beloved. Often she went out into the night

to wait for another revelation of the Presence, until there came the thought that somewhere in that Beyond where Victor preceded her, he was advancing, going forward with some task dear to his heart. Perhaps it would help him to progress if he were not earthbound by claims upon him. Olga could not realize from whence had come this assurance, but her knowledge seemed as indisputable as a proven theory on a printed page. She knew, and nothing else mattered.

So it helped her to play a brave game of aiding Victor who was engaged in some cherished pursuit. When she went into the starry quietness now, it was to keep tryst with Victor's spirit, to tell him her plans and decisions. It was enough for her merely to tell him thus; she found herself requiring no visions.

II

New York was not entirely a strange place to Olga, who had gone down, as many Brockton people do, to shop for a few days in the fascinating stores along the One Street in North America.

The apartment she had taken now with baby Stanbury, and Braxton to "housekeep," was a furnished one left by a friend of Genevieve Rankin's gone to England to become a teacher of Braille in the Rankins' hospital, now growing famous. "Mr. Jimmie" Rutherford had helped her in the change from Brockton to New York, adjusting financial matters or packing fragile china with equal skill and interest. Stock in Victor's pulp mills, and other investments, had provided Olga with sufficient income, even though her personal revenues from abroad were withheld.

It made little difference in her program to find that money in Austrian and Russian banks could not be obtained.

Save for the sense of loss, which time had not yet dulled, Olga was happy in this new life. New York was a wonder city. A city of women and middle-aged men. Of course the war had sent all the younger men away, but even were they in town, she would have been as certain of their comparative unimportance in the scheme of things. These older men were invariably the business heads; the women and girls carried on the details of business management, or frequently some brilliant woman was entirely in charge of a firm's activities. Surely, thought Olga, here was the promised land for ambitious womankind. Such assurance she had never known before, as that which radiated from the young women whom she saw in the stores or along Fifth Avenue. Those not in uniform were in smart suits with short skirts above legs in sheerest stockings, their throats swathed in furs, little hats cocked gaily over hair bobbed or puffed out at the ears in the beginning of the ridiculous mode which was to sweep the country from Main Street to Main Street. And the faces! Often carmine lips and cheeks, penciled shadows under bright eyes where thin plucked brows arched rapidly. Yet Olga was amazed to discover that these were not creatures obliged to hide the creeping marks of time; they were girls, young things, and not those who had a sinister business in the attraction of attention to themselves. These girls *were* young America, helping to direct the affairs of a great country; they were free, as girls on the continent could never achieve freedom. Olga imagined the companions of her convent days let loose in the world

to make a living. Impossible thought! This war which was making the "world safe for Democracy," what would it do for those sheltered beings in Vienna and the poor peasants of Russia, both classes equally at the depth of a chasm of ignorance? The lovely Julie Auersperg, gentle Countess Dericote, haunting Olga's memory like a wraith; or Marya, the stubbornly brave little peasant, and Feodor, the innocent, capable of martyrdom for a great cause. Where were they now? What had the war done for them? and Aunt Soscha? Never through any of the newspapers had come the least hint of a Countess Hohenwald; whether she had been killed, or had emigrated to Switzerland, Olga could not tell. Two years ago there had been a letter from Emelie von Lichtenstein at St. Moritz, but it contained no word of Soscha. Such thoughts came to her as she watched the American girls in the stores and on the streets. "Almost all of them are like princesses," she decided; "they carry their heads so high."

The friend of Genevieve Rankin's had recommended a private kindergarten for little Stanbury, "going on six" years old, and the very fact that he had been established there left Olga with even more time. Here was her chance to join the procession of American girls and learn the secret of their freedom and happiness. With what else might she, Olga Renfrew, employ her time? Idly brushing out her shining bronze hair one morning in the cheerful little boudoir fronting on Park Avenue, high enough to give a pleasant view of roofs and the spires of St. Patrick's to the south, she made mental inventory of herself. Voice? No! It was a pleasant and cultured speaking

voice, but not strong enough for singing. Figure and general appearance? Slender and smart enough, but the stage held no inducements and it wasn't necessary to be a mannequin—one only did that for the sake of the money, and rightly. Think how unpleasant it would be to parade about before stupid old dowagers and leering old men. Pfah! Olga shook her head and plied the brush more vigorously. She could neither paint nor write well enough to justify an attempt at a career in these branches of the arts. One should feel the "call" to them as truly as to the office of a clergyman or priest. Yet surely there must be something.

She left the dressing table and went to stand at the north window, where rose the tall bulk of the Plaza, an absence of other structures beyond it denoting the great expanse of Central Park. Still further north was that American university—Columbia College. Why could she not study there? The classics, literature,—or law would be interesting. Everyone should be informed about the law, for such knowledge might have saved poor Feodor, long ago. Why was it that her thoughts turned so constantly to him? Could he be alive and released from prison? Perhaps he had joined the army and been killed.

Suddenly came a thought of the courses in journalism, of which she had heard a great deal in Brockton, and which, curiously enough, she did not associate with "writing," as such. Jimmie Rutherford was always speaking of the work of this American Pulitzer, who had founded the school and refuted the argument that reporters were born, not made. "Reporters," indeed! Olga looked back with a shudder to that dreadful day when the venom of

some reporter had been allowed to spread into his story and bring swift death unexpectedly to an innocent man. Could she ever endure a life which bred such men as Dodd, of the *Sphere*? But he must be the exception, not the rule. There were others who had been fine gentlemen, friends of Victor's, possessed of a certain gallant knight-errantry. Well, at least she could investigate the possibility of a woman going into that sort of work, visit Columbia, and try to enter the school of journalism.

Turning from the window she noted that men were already sitting at luncheon tables in the windows of the Racquet Club, across the way. A glance at her enameled clock showed it to be close to half past twelve! Scandalous! The morning had gone with her dreaming.

III

It had not been easy as thought to enter the school, for Olga's only credits from the Viennese and German convents were not acceptable. In vain she tried to convince the authorities that she was quite harmless—that she had been only a simple school girl in Berlin. But no, these were war times, and one took no chances. The most they could do was to let her enroll as a special student who would not be permitted to work for credit. Her own efforts and the results obtained would determine her further fate. There was nothing to be done but go on as best she might and trust that fortune would favor her. At least it was something with which to occupy her time.

The newspaper fraternity being a far-reaching and cautious one, with numberless news sources not apparent

to the casual observer, and as many little connections and affiliations as it counts staff members, the entrance of such a student as Olga into the profession was not entirely unnoticed. At any rate there had appeared in the class-room one day a reporter introduced to Olga by a mutual friend as Chaunce Preston, dramatic critic for a publication which had taken one of Olga's book reviews. For in the course of time she had grown interested in her work and fond of the big brick and stone building where she learned the meaning of such mysterious words as "copy" and "scoop," "galley" and "morgue." Much study, coupled with perusals of the papers for comparison of style, had taught Olga the essential difference between editorials, the news story, dramatic, musical, and artistic criticisms, feature stories, and book reviews. She found that her life abroad and her knowledge of the courts stood her in good stead; she had more "background" than the average boy or girl who had collected enough money to bring him from the gaudy pleasures of Lima, Ohio, to embrace the profession of a journalist in New York City. Gradually she had made an impression, as the offer for her book reviews indicated, and meeting this Mr. Preston then, she looked upon him as a sort of big brother in the profession, since he had on his part shown appreciation of her progress. He had been in service with the American forces overseas, where he lost two fingers in the accidental explosion of a hand grenade, and after some attempt to find another place in the military machine had returned to his first love, the theatre, regarded by him with the objectivity of the true critic. He had joined the secret

service as hundreds of other men were doing, and found himself chosen to keep a supervisory eye upon a young foreigner at the Pulitzer school who had boldly asked credit for work taken in Austrian and German convents. From the moment of introduction duty became a pleasure to Preston, immediately intrigued by the slightly theatrical manner which his charge "the young foreigner," who was an attractive girl, and not a man as he had at first supposed, unconsciously affected when a trifle nervous or on the defensive. There was some story behind the personality of this fascinating, child-like creature, mother of the up-to-date and inquiring youngster who was brought to visit the school one afternoon in the company of an elderly companion-nurse called "Braxton."

It being Preston's business to learn what little Mrs. Renfrew did with her time, it was only natural that he should occasionally invite her, as their acquaintance developed, to "first nights," where she was delighted to have him point out celebrities in the audience,—society women, financiers, artists, authors, actors, and playwrights who had come to witness a rival's production.

"There's one of our fellow journalists," Preston said, one evening, indicating a tall, striking-looking man in evening dress who was one of a party entering the lobby with them. "Galbraith worked up to be managing editor of the *Star* before he left active newspaper work for the writing game. He was a wonder, that boy; even as a cub they say he had the most wonderful nose for news of anyone who ever turned copy in to the *Star* local room, and that's saying something and everything."

Olga gazed at this Galbraith with interest. "It doesn't show very much," she said at last.

"Doesn't show? What do you mean?" Preston fumbled in his pocket for the tickets.

"What you spoke of, his nose for news," she answered, in all seriousness, eyes growing wide at Preston's unrestrained mirth.

"Bless your heart, child, didn't you ever hear that before?" he said cheerfully. "That's only a way of saying that he's a good reporter and gets news for his paper before it breaks for the others. He seems to scent stories and trail them just the way a hunting dog or a bloodhound has a 'nose' for running down the game." Olga, amused, and only a trifle abashed, reflectively ran a slender forefinger along the bridge of her own little nose.

"I wonder how it would feel to have one," she speculated, mischievously.

"I like this," she sighed, at length, settling in a cushioned chair in the orchestra circle, having learned that the critics are not the important-looking people who occupy the boxes. "It is like the old days in the Hofburg Theatre on the Franzenring," she finished softly, under her breath, since this was early in 1919 when the glories of the Austrian empire were fast fading.

"Why can't you tell me the story of your life, little gypsy?" asked Preston, adjusting her wrap. It was by just such remarks as her last exclamation that he might judge of her foreign associations.

"Ho, I could not do that," she replied, laughing ever so slyly. "It is what they say here, 'a long, sad story.'

I had rather tell you about the boy I met to-day, who is a plumber by trade, but a builder of pipe organs by desire. He is a very sweet boy, and it is hard for him to work at fitting clumsy lead pipes when he wants to work with the more delicate mechanism of the organ. He is coming to have tea with me Tuesday."

"Tea with you? A plumber coming to tea?" Preston roared enjoyment. "My *dear* Mrs. Renfrew! You're deliciously ridiculous! Whoever heard of a plumber coming to tea in your section of Park Avenue? You can't mean it seriously."

"Well, and why not?" Olga queried whimsically, yet with a firm note in her voice. "Is this not a free country? Do you not boast that all your men are created free and equal? Why should not a plumber, who is withal a gentleman, come to tea with me? I tell you that he is an artist with a soul. Some day he will become famous with one of those pipe organs."

"Oh, nonsense! He's putting something over on you. He'll be awkward with the silverware and too frightened to eat as many as he wants of the little cakes, and he won't be comfortable in your silk brocade and tapestry chairs.

"A plumber in this country is a working man. His sort doesn't indulge in afternoon tea with ladies. Come on, break the date and go to tea with me at the Ritz. Now *I'm* the kind of person who looks well in a drawing-room or at a tea table."

"Yes, but you can neither erect pipe organs nor repair plumbing, and this boy can do both. You and I, with our 'criticism,' are only tearing down what someone else

has given weeks and months to build up." The dimming of the lights and the rise of the curtain commanded silence.

"I say, you're rather hitting below the belt," commented Preston in a hasty whisper.

But he discovered later that the organ-builder plumber had tea with Olga on Tuesday just the same.

IV

Olga was happy, and the months sped by. Her work, her few friends, her little son who was the sole link with the old life,—all these claimed her mind and heart.

In the world about her there was still war between the nations. The war had dealt harshly with Olga in Canada, so that in this new environment she shrank from any participation in affairs of the moment. Her work had thrown her into the maelstrom which catches one thing and bears it aloft to-day, only to suck it into oblivion to-morrow. Some things could not be avoided, when stories, plays, books, and people alike were absorbed in the war, yet the very demand of her profession that its followers record facts and not their own opinions saved her from the need of declarations which she might not have been able to make satisfactorily, for she did not know toward whom her sympathies were directed, save that great, pathetic country in the north,—poor Russia, the pitiful, clumsy tool of a crafty man, and after all, Russia was her country,—not Austria, Germany, England, Canada, nor even this United States. No matter if she were free to wander, her heart held an affection for this oppressed land.

As she thought thus, there sometimes came a shadow over her brooding mind. Had she the right to forget her earliest ties of nationality and blood? Was there not some duty, perhaps even to Soscha, the stern, who had not been able entirely to break her youthful will? It was hard to think of those gay Viennese as starving souls going lower and lower in the human scale, sloughing civilization as they went. Had she, Olga, Baroness von Kranz, the moral right to dismiss these people from her mind and direct her energies only toward her own happiness? Yet after all, she was taking a living and a measure of protection from the United States. Did not this imply some obligation?

She walked briskly up Fifth Avenue one sunny afternoon, leaning back against a March wind that tried uncivilly to hasten her foot-steps. As she went on the old struggle rose within her.

All life was a compromise. As a child her freedom had been compromised for the sake of security, and now must she again sacrifice freedom in a compromise with some vague duty? Every life was so indissolubly bound with other lives, was there any such thing as individuality? In this strange land she had queer moments of intense loneliness, a desire for protection, for shelter. Was this compatible with her reiterated longing for an abstract freedom? What did she want? Was all this a pose,—all her prattling?

At Fifty-Second Street, Cartier's corner, she left the Avenue. Her problem was far from its solution, and not even a bright green gown in Hickson's window could distract her attention.

v

Early in April Chaunce Preston, who had by this time fallen completely under the spell of her personality, invited Olga to an exhibition in Knoedler's gallery and as a special treat they took Stanbury along. The child's chatterings added their share to the happiness of the excursion, for Preston had long since learned to be fond of the lad with blue-gray eyes that were not like his mother's. His manners were quaint and delightful, coupling their perfection of form with a saving grace of complete ingenuousness.

Walking along the Avenue, Stanbury tugged at his mother's hand. "Across the street there, Mother," he said, "do you see that dog?" Over the way a shaggy Airedale on a leash was in charge of a boy dressed like Stanbury in dark blue serge sailor suit with long trousers and a reefer coat, the boy in his turn under the chaperonage of a nursemaid. "That dog, Mother; I know him, *personally*."

"Yes, dear?" said Olga, smiling at Preston over the lad's head. "Who is the little boy?"

"Oh, he's in the first class. His father is captain of a battleship. But I know his dog better than I know him; 'Byng's' his name, and he makes me think of Punchinello. I wish we had Punchinello here, Mother." The boy's tone was wistful.

"And who's Punchinello?" asked Preston, in his deep, cheerful man's voice.

"We'd had him ever since I was born," announced Stanbury, importantly, "but Mother said to leave him

when we came to live here. Now we only have Mother's little Peke. But Kwang isn't a man's dog."

Listening to the two, Olga was conscious that her little son was being cheated. Why had Victor been taken when this boy needed him so? If there could be someone to take his father's place? But such thought was disloyal, and in consequence to be dismissed.

So they came to the gallery and were soon interested in the paintings and etchings of which the exhibition consisted. Stanbury became intent upon the work of a man entrenched behind a table full of copper plates, trays of acid, brushes, and tools, demonstrating the processes by which an etching is made. Presently Olga and Preston strolled across the room to study a lovely bit representing the North Shore dune country. Her attention was attracted by Stanbury, from whom they had become separated by a jog in the gallery. Unseen by the child, she watched him trotting from group to group looking for his mother. What a lovely boy he was, with his sturdy body and earnest young face that could be so marvelously lighted when he smiled by those eyes of his father's! Pride of possession and motherhood swelled in her heart, so that Chaunce Preston, a trifle world-weary and sick of the suspicions of his duty, regarded her with a side glance and reading her thoughts, said to himself, "Gad! She's like a delicate instrument for the play of her emotions. I'd give the world for half her fire." Then Stanbury saw them, and came on at a faster pace.

"Oh, Mother!" he called. "I know how to make an etching. It's the acid that eats the lines on the copper plate," but Preston stepped forward to greet a middle-

aged man of distinguished appearance, who was approaching.

"Alan Winslow,—of all people," cried Preston, grasping the other's hand. "What are you doing in town, you old curmudgeon? Explain yourself." He turned to Olga. "I don't believe you've ever met this scoundrel, have you, Olga? Mrs. Renfrew, let me present Alan Winslow, Esquire, a provincial from up the Hudson. I may whisper to you as a state secret that he has designs on the senate of the United States, having gained the nomination for senator just a few weeks ago."

Acknowledging the introduction, Olga was aware that Mr. Winslow did not relish Preston's facetiousness. For several moments they talked of generalities. At last Preston said, "Before it gets too late, I must take Stanbury to see the Chinese blue porcelain dog with red hair. I promised,—do you remember, old man?" The boy clapped his hands and pranced a bit in coltish enthusiasm. "You two follow us around to the corridor where they keep the beast. You're coming to tea with us afterwards, you know, Winslow." He went off at a terrific rate, with Stanbury hurrying at his side.

This had been the very situation for which Winslow had been planning ever since he had visited classes at Columbia, as a minor incident in his campaign, and had seen this delightful creature. Being an exceedingly methodical man, at once he set about learning her name and as much of her history as the scant knowledge of her associates afforded. Then, after some months, he discovered that this little Mrs. Renfrew was doing book reviews and occasional criticisms of drama and art for

one of the afternoon papers, so it became his custom to haunt the galleries during the large openings in the hope of seeing her. Now that he was actually walking beside this woman of his dreams the practical side of Alan's nature demanded that he make the most of the opportunity.

"You live here in New York?" he angled, innocently, as though he knew less than nothing of Olga's haunts in the town.

"Yes," she answered, looking straight at this new acquaintance, appraising his high, intellectual forehead and keen hazel eyes. His was the genuine scholar's face, with something of a Cæsar's determination reflected in the slightly aquiline nose and thin-lipped mouth veiled by a fine brown mustache and close-cropped beard. His countenance was powerful, indicating vast reserves of strength; and as his gaze rested on Olga, it was tender and gentle. But there was just a hint of stubborn intolerance in that nose, and just a gleam of cruel vanity in the eyes; what Alan Winslow had was his, and he would fight the very devil to prove his rights. Those who were of his family knew how hard and cold a just and upright man may sometimes be, yet when he chose to exert his mental powers, he seemed indeed a giant, and of noble stature. Olga had yet to learn that a broad, deep mind and a smaller soul go often linked in the same body.

They were accomplishing nothing of value to Alan as they went after the others to find the blue porcelain dog with the red hair, and he determined to try bolder methods.

"We should evolve some sort of signaling between your

windows and the one beside my table in the club," he said, at last, watching for the effect.

"The club?" Olga echoed in astonishment. "Do you mean the Racquet?"

"Yes. You live just across the street, don't you?" His tone was quietly triumphant.

"If I did, how would you know?" Olga was not sure whether to rebuff these odd remarks or to follow their lead, but her intrepid nature got the better of her. Alan smiled,—a warm, understanding sort of smile. He knew her thoughts so completely that she was torn between amazement and a vague fear. She wanted to be cross with him, but she scarcely dared risk the chance of learning to what lengths this man would go. They were sparring like two ridiculous children.

"My dear Mr. Winslow, did I understand correctly that you are by profession a detective? Your methods are most extraordinary. Do you employ this system with everyone you meet?"

"Come, come. You mustn't behave like an offended child. I had hesitated to tell you in so many words that I have been watching you for the past six months hoping for such a moment as this when I might meet you." He swung his light stick with a flourish. "Seriously, Mrs. Renfrew, I wonder if you'd permit me to call on you some afternoon. I'm not the man to mince words, but I am one who knows what he wants. Possibly I may appear to speak impulsively, though it doesn't seem impulse to me, after these months of waiting."

Olga drew her brows together in a puzzled frown. She was glad they had come upon Preston and her little son,

standing before a great glaring creature of shiniest blue porcelain, highly glazed, with little pointed knobs of red all over the top of his head. Preston was telling Stanbury the story of the dog, which had guarded a temple door centuries ago.

"Oh, Mother," said the boy, in an excited voice. "Come and see Li Chung Tien, the sacred dog. If Kwang ever growled, he would look just like this one, only not blue. I wish we could take him home. Kwang would be awfully surprised."

"Yes, dear," Olga responded, painfully conscious of Alan and fearful lest Preston would notice an unnatural restraint in her manner. "Chaunce," she turned to the latter, "do you have to stay here much longer? I'm getting tired. It's so close and stuffy." She turned slightly away and would not meet his eyes as he answered her.

"I can leave any time you say. We'll go and have tea somewhere. And you come, too, Winslow. Remember what I said." Preston patted his shoulder affectionately. "It's fine to see you again."

Alan's hazel eyes lighted in another slow smile. "Thank you quite as much," he replied smoothly, "but I really can't go. I didn't tell you that I am meeting Nicholas Dougall here in half an hour. We're going on to a reception up on the Drive some place. It's one of those 'I'm Lucy Blackwell; have you read my latest book?' affairs, I believe. But Dougall reminds me that those people have a vote, too, so I obey him like a little dog when he orders me to go to such things."

"We have votes, too," answered Preston. "You

shouldn't offend any of your future constituency, you know."

"He's most polite, isn't he?" Alan directed his question to Olga, who gave the merest monosyllable in reply. "No! I must bid you good-day, and thank you quite as much." Again he spoke to Olga. "But I shall give myself the pleasure of coming to tea with *you* within the week. You'll be at home, I am sure?"

Before Preston and her son Olga was obliged to be composed. "I shall always be glad to see a friend of Mr. Preston's," she said, without meeting Alan's eyes.

CHAPTER XV

I

IN spite of herself, under the friendship and guidance of Alan Winslow, life spread its fascinating panorama before her through the spring and summer days. Rightly enough Alan had guessed how much Olga desired to become more familiar with American society and American customs,—the deep, inner reaches of thought in the native mind, which the transient or casual visitor cannot plumb. Enthusiastic about his own state, and after that immensely proud of the resources and beauties of the nation, he had determined a subtle campaign against this lady's heart, in which his country should help him. American life would be presented in a series of flashing pictures, vignettes as clearly defined as old prints, with the tacit understanding that all this manner of existence, whichever sort she chose to accept, would be hers for the asking, upon the acceptance of his heart and hand in marriage. To his determined mind there came no thought of a possible comparison between his motives and those of a certain devil in scriptures who had offered the nations of the world spread out before the Holy One gazing from a high mountain top. Persuaded to remain in town for the summer on Alan's recommendation, Olga visited Saratoga, the smart; Long Island, the heterogeneous; Mauchunk, the fascinating and terrible for its fathomless dark lake.

A week in the fashionable seclusion of Watkin's Glen; up the Hudson by boat, and down along the shore in Alan's motor sent to meet her, flashing back through little towns in the hills, and seldom losing sight of the majestic river against its background of the Catskills, now sharply defined, now retreating into their lofty mists. A day in some quaint little village like Hudson, where the sleepy main street ended abruptly in a tiny park on a high bluff with the inevitable Revolutionary monument overlooking railroad tracks on the bank below. It was a curious pot-pourri of association with all the elements of a composite national existence which took on added glamor as Alan's magic wand of possibility revealed them.

Included in their party was always the capable Braxton for the joint duties of chaperon and nurse. Alan discouraged additions to the personnel of these jaunts, since, wherever he directed Olga, there were friends of his to welcome her and provide companionship. At White Sulphur Springs and Saratoga, some of the smartest women had been ready to meet and include her in their daily rounds of dressing and bridge and other activities, depending upon individual temperament. To such places Alan would occasionally come for the week end, and strengthen the acquaintances his protégée had gathered unto herself; whilst there at the dinners, which were a part of their program, Olga had sufficient opportunity to observe Alan's influence and the respect he commanded. Deliberately, he sometimes suggested a more quiet place, like Yama Farms, and consistently refused to run out, even for afternoon tea. He was giving her time to correlate impressions and realize what a striking figure she

might cut in this world about her if she were the wife of Alan Winslow. The whole affair was planned and executed with the most scrupulous care, so that no breath of scandal might touch these harmless excursions.

Of course there were some comments. A certain Ellen Ponsonby, sitting with the friend of her heart, Jess Lathrop, in the shelter of the former's parked landaulet, at the edge of a certain polo field one cool August afternoon, was hearing the latest news from Jess, just returned from a camp in the Adirondacks. "Did you say Simon Donnelly was there? Then that Phillips girl must have been somewhere about, I'll wager. What on earth is her Aunt Kate thinking of, to let Jane Phillips run all over North and South America after a red-head like Simon! All he cares for is hunting and fishing, which isn't Aunt Kate's idea at all, as you very well know. Then suddenly Jane begins a career of hunting and fishing of a different sort, on her own. Plain fool, she is."

"Oh, but Ellen, my dear! Jane's performances were not the main attraction. No, indeedy! That little Mrs. Renfrew and her small son were there. But in spite of the fact that we were all expecting him, Alan Winslow never appeared once. You remember her, don't you? When we were at the Inn two months ago? Rather a pretty thing, with bronzy colored hair and big brown eyes. She's got a style all her own, too. And she must spend a young fortune on her clothes. If you could have seen a white knitted dress she wore one morning! Oh, my dear!

"She convulsed Peter Witherspoon by announcing that in the fall, she was going to this White Sulphur everyone talked about, and take another 'cure.' It was all right to

talk about *badens* and *spas* abroad, but if you wanted to know about anything here in America, you had to go through a course of sprouts at the Springs. Peter's always contended, you know, that the cures, as such, were all poppy-cock; that we women just go down to gossip with Polly Buckingham from San Francisco, and the leading social lights of Boston, Washington, Detroit, Chicago, and Westchester County. We, having been there, won't argue over its character as a social arena."

"But, Jess, about this Mrs. Renfrew?" interrupted Ellen, stabbing the ferrule of a black and white parasol into a corner of the car. "What is Alan Winslow thinking of, if it isn't marrying the woman? He's been running a regular Cook's tour of New York state and its environs. Always for this woman and her companion, who plays nursemaid for the little boy when he goes along. True to type, Alan stays in the background and doesn't come near lest his precious political reputation become endangered, but wherever Mrs. R. goes, Alan's influence follows like a pillar of fire by day and a pillar of cloud by night."

"Ellen, my dear, never quote strange authors. Common sense, darling,—say cloud by day, and fire by night."

"Nonsense! You and your logical mind! I don't care whether its brimstone and skyrockets. I want to know how soon Alan Winslow and this woman are going to marry. Has she any family connections?"

"Well, Renfrew is a very good name in Canada; and I understand that she came from Brockton. I've heard her speak of an aunt in England,—Lady Somebody-or-other,—but she doesn't know many Americans. She's a sweet

little body, though, and I think she'd make Alan Winslow a good wife. . . . Oh, Ellen! We haven't been paying any attention to the playing. Listen to the applause. We've missed something, and I know such a little about this game anyway." Jess leaned from the car and motioned to a tanned young man nearby, who stood leaning on his stick beside one of the motors.

"Walter," she called, "oh, Walter Paden! What was all the excitement just now? We were gossiping and missed it. Come here and tell me all about it—there's a good boy."

II

One morning the telephone in Olga's apartment rang abruptly.

"Yes?" she answered, with the tiny rising inflection, characteristic of herself. "Yes? . . . Oh, Lady *Cornelia*, I am glad to hear your voice again. Where are you now? When can I see you?" The sentences came tumbling out while Olga smiled and beamed at the telephone as though, through it, this old friend could see her pleasure. "We have luncheon in an hour. Can you come then and stay for the afternoon? I want so much to talk to you."

Assured that Lady *Cornelia* would come, Olga flew about the house, changing the order for luncheon, bidding Braxton to have Stanbury brought home from school earlier than usual, and thinking all the while of this woman she would see again after so many years. *Cornelia* had been in England when the storm of Olga's afflictions broke, but had sent a short letter from the hospital where she was in charge of functional re-educational

tion to assure the young matron, who had captured her fancy, of her trust and belief. Now, after many months' service, Cornelia had come back to America to rest and compile a volume of Joel's memoirs and some bits of poetry he had done. The world had known him as a matter-of-fact person, and she desired to honor his memory by an attempt to establish his name in the ranks of those latter-day Elizabethans who had been shaping modern English poetry. Cornelia had heard rumors of Olga Renfrew's career in New York from someone posted on the chatter of the fashionable hotels, and she resolved to run down to the city for first-hand information.

Their meeting was most affecting and affectionate, for neither of them had realized their capacity for mutual friendship in the olden busy days before the war. Olga had practically no women friends upon whom she could depend, for the simple reason that members of her own sex were more likely than not to be jealous of her attraction for men. But Cornelia had been different, because she possessed a secure position at a wise age that would not quarrel with the nature of youth, and its expression. The day being raw for September, a bit of fire burned on the hearth beneath the mantel of old Italian marble, when Lady Pendleton was announced by Evans, Olga's butler. It was a moment of swift, deep emotion, in which the two women clung to each other silently, lest the flood of memory break the composure each was determined not to lose.

"My dear, dear child," said Cornelia, at last, holding Olga off to look at her, rather younger than usual in a

green dress with a bodice cut in shoulder straps over a blouse of heavy white silk, long-sleeved and Eton-collared like a boy's jacket, so that she seemed to combine the charm of wood-nymph and gallant lad. In her turn, Olga saw a more matronly Cornelia, wearing deep wistaria, second mourning for Joel. But there was the same clear light in her gray eyes, and the same gentle, humorous curve to shape her lips. Her soft hair was iron-gray now, yet her face was singularly free from ugly lines. One knew that Lady Pendleton's thoughts were wholesome and fine, that her purposes were high.

Steadily she seemed to search the other's mind. "Little Olga, little Olga," she said, "you have grown sad and wise since I saw you last. What was it?" And forthwith they were plunged into a long conversation that had no words to waste for triviality, since it must cover time and space and distance, sorrow and joy.

Much later in the afternoon, when Stanbury had left them for his supper, having been brought in to meet Lady Cornelia, the latter asked Olga to come for dinner at her hotel. Curtains had been drawn against the austere twilight, one or two lamps were glowing and in sheltered corners, candles gleamed on great, tall five-branched iron standards with a medieval atmosphere about them.

"It is lovely and quiet here, Olga, but come down with me, and after dinner we can go for a long drive. The change and the fresh air will be good for us. But I want to have you with me wherever we are. I had not thought to be so fond of you. See, I confess frankly."

With a warm smile, Olga answered the tender, mischievous one that crinkled the corners of Cornelia's mouth,

"It doesn't matter, so long as you like me," she replied. "Being with you, and free to talk my heart out about Victor and the old happy days has been heavenly." She hesitated a second and looked at Cornelia with vaguely troubled eyes. "If you will excuse me, I must telephone to Mr. Winslow. I was going to dinner with him. . . . No, indeed, it doesn't matter at all." Olga checked Cornelia's protesting exclamation. "I'd far, far rather be with you. Alan takes so much of my time," she smiled deprecatingly.

"Wait, dear," said Cornelia, as Olga went toward a telephone extension in the tiny entrance hall. "Tell him you will not dine with him, but let him call for us and take us to drive. I should like to meet him, and perhaps it's a trifle better to have a man along on such a ride as I proposed in the evening."

While Olga was arranging affairs over the 'phone, Cornelia sat quietly, hands folded in her lap, calm, thoughtful eyes fixed on the glowing logs. She must learn what manner of man he was who could woo Olga's eager soul from the simple pursuits of a life devoted to her son's welfare. From the depths of her wisdom she had sensed that a strange fever fired the spirit of this girl, so often tried, and yet so strangely unconquered and alert. Of all the people who knew her, Cornelia Pendleton had discerned the untrammelled self which was the true Olga, struggling and struggling toward an ideal of spiritual and personal liberty, and marked by a certain aloofness that was the reward of the effort.

When Olga returned, Cornelia asked a question or two about this Mr. Winslow. "He wanted to take both of us

to dinner, but I told him that it was only by special favor that he was being allowed to join us at all," said Olga. "Now I must change my things. Had you rather wait here, Cornelia, or will you come with me?"

"Why should I sit out here by my lonesome self?" queried the gently smiling Cornelia, rising to follow Olga to the pale green and gray boudoir which was her ultimate refuge. From a cozy, overstuffed chair cushioned in gray silk, she pursued conversation on the subject of Mr. Winslow, with one direct question. "If it isn't too bold a thing to ask, my dear, do you consider marrying Mr. Winslow?"

Olga met her eyes reflected in the mirror of the dressing table before which she sat brushing up her hair, lighted by the big, shaded lamp suspended above. "What would you think of me if I did?" parried Olga, turning directly toward Cornelia, who recognized a familiar habit of meeting one query with another.

"That is something I could not say without having met the man in question, though my first impulse would be to rely upon your judgment. Your reason would be a very good one, I am sure. You know I have always been your champion. I only asked the question as I did because a number of people seemed to expect an announcement of your marriage to be merely a matter of time." To her surprise, Olga rather fiercely resumed brushing stray locks into place.

"Gossip! I hate it," she exclaimed tensely. "All my life it has followed me. If people could be happy with their own business, I should be very glad." A momentary silence, then, with quick change of mood, "But there, I

must not be cross! Forgive me, Lady Cornelia, and I will tell you about Alan." A smile ingenuous as a child's gave a flashing glimpse of her white teeth.

"You should know the quality of his mind. There is nothing upon which he is not informed. I think of his mind as something apart, crystal clear and beautiful. And he is one of these American people—one of them—so that I would be one of them, too, if I took his name." A pause in the conversation whilst Olga rose and went to wash her hands in the shining little bathroom beyond the mirrored door. She called above the sound of faintly splashing water, "Is it that you were afraid I had forgotten Victor?" She appeared in the doorway, drying her fingers on a bit of fine towel.

"I'm an older woman, dear. Perhaps my ideas are all nonsense. But I can't think of anyone taking Joel's place in my life. Please don't misunderstand. I shouldn't think of passing judgment, and I don't mean to hurt you."

Olga slipped into a simple frock of black charmeuse, and stood fastening its glossy soft folds before the mirror. "I don't blame you for speaking so. Perhaps I can explain that I have never felt Victor to be very far from me. It seems to me that he knows why I want companionship and friendliness, of which his death cheated and robbed me. Until I met him I was a lonely, dependent little figure, I am afraid. After he died, I was more lonely than ever, and moreover, I had learned to depend upon his strong, gentle nature, though at the same time, I had the old, old longing for freedom. When I was Victor's wife, I had perhaps the greatest happiness I shall ever know.

"All my life I had been bound by rules of convention, living where great streams of highly ordered society passed around me, where every individual had his appointed place. I have known courts and emperors, and it was the death of your king, Edward, and the etiquette surrounding it which set me free from the convent in which my aunt had placed me for daring to go counter to prescribed laws. Then, when I was so happy in Canada, the menace of court association followed to mock me during the war and bring death to Victor. Naturally I have wished all my life to be free—first from the restrictions of courts and their false standards of humanity—then from an aristocratic society which held royalty and its divine rights in high regard, even though it pretended to be democratic. At last, here in the United States, I thought to find absolutely the freedom I had desired. But no! In this great town I am a nobody because I am not an American." Olga looked at the little enameled clock on her dressing table. "I want to take fifteen minutes more to tell you about all this," she said, sinking into the low chair. "We shan't be late."

"Go on, dear," replied Cornelia, "I want you to finish your story."

"Well, I worked here in the atmosphere of liberty the American girl knows, but there was something lacking. I am in America, but not of it. Then comes this Alan Winslow, with his clear, brilliant mind. He is cultured; he has traveled; moreover, he is one of their native aristocracy, since he has told me that a Winslow came to this country on that *Mayflower* of which they are all so proud. In my heart I thought when Alan Winslow would

have me become his wife—"Here is my chance to become an American, for surely this man is a true American who will open to me the freedom of his native country." I talk about this aloud when I am alone, and I believe Victor hears me and understands. Yes,—you can realize how true that is." A betraying emotion on Cornelia's face had given the sign that she had had her own spiritual communion with Joel.

"The old love does not come back," Olga resumed. "But there is admiration for the power of a great mind,—there is desire to be a genuine companion. I am attractive and still young. I would be an ornament to his house—a light to his pathway. But also I will gain a companion and a place in the life of this land. Is that not natural, perhaps? I would not go slinking back to the old court life in Europe. Anyway the war has destroyed all its form and pretense. Sometimes I think it is justification for my childish attitude of instinctive rebellion.

"And besides, there is Stanbury. Have I not the right to choose for him the most modern, the best environment? Has he not the right to a man's influence in his little life? I can't think of making him one of these creatures who show so plainly that they have been trained only by women. Victor would not like it, either."

Cornelia sat quiet for a time after Olga had finished. "I am glad that you have told me these things so frankly. I had been afraid that perhaps you were trying to be happy without admitting reasons to yourself, but you have been more than logical. After all, you are young, and youth has the right to happiness. Perhaps if I had someone like your little son, I should be looking forward,

rather than seeking to build up the past again with my letters and poems; though it is a living thing that I am trying to create, too."

The two women rose and stood facing each other in the softly lighted room. "You see it is not right," said Olga, "that I am held a prisoner; and though I shall always mean to be careful and wise, you must believe in me—whatever I do."

III

A fortnight later, Chaunce Preston stopped in for tea and noted with satisfaction that Olga still seemed the vivacious, glowing creature he had known of old,—clad in a mauve house gown with an exotic design in batik.

"It is so nice to see you," Olga exclaimed. "Come into the little library and tell me all about the paper. I noticed that Fitzgerald has let them play up the book reviews more than he used to. Have you read 'Mary Olivier' yet? I admire her,—she had such a quiet way of taking things she wanted; she was successful, too. I wish I'd done the review for it; but Alan doesn't want me to do that sort of thing any more." She smiled, with mild defiance in her eyes.

"So?" inquired Chaunce, settled in a big tapestry chair. "You're going to be a regular lady, are you? . . . Well, what's the odds, so long as you'll be happy."

The tea tray had been brought in and Olga murmured, "Of course," as she poured a cupful. "Do you want rum, or just lemon and sugar?" she asked.

"My dear! What a question! Rum, of course. . . . Ah, thank you! This *is* cozy, if we old newshounds would

only admit it. . . . And so old Alan draws the line at having you do reviews?" He stirred his tea reflectively.

"Y' know, you're a funny girl. You've always said you wanted freedom, and yet the moment you get what approximates it, you turn 'round and engage yourself to a man destined for practically the most convention-bound circles in our country."

"Chaunce! What do you mean?" There was faint alarm in Olga's manner as she leaned toward him from her place on the soft couch.

He looked at her soberly and took out a thin leather cigarette case. "Mind if I smoke?"

"Oh no, certainly not. Take one of these," said Olga, hastily passing toward him a Florentine box of cigarettes. "I beg your pardon."

"That's all right. I'll just smoke one of my own. That Russian tobacco is a bit strong." He lit the slender paper cylinder and blew a ring of smoke into the still air. "If you'll permit me, I'm going to give you a bit of help," he began.

"You'll have to make up your mind to be as conventional and more so than you ever were in your foreign life. Alan Winslow's forefather, who came over here in the *Mayflower*, as you may know, was an intolerant sort for all that he had been a victim of religious persecution in England. Intolerance is such an easy habit to cultivate. And Alan has inherited more than a little of his feeling.

"Understand, I'm not coming here to rip a friend up the back, especially to the woman about to become his wife, but I had an intuition that I ought to set you straight about a few things. You see, the wife of a

United States senator would be obliged to live in Washington a great deal of the time, and during the season there, whilst Congress is in session, the social life of the place is very closely linked with political affairs. Even the President himself is only human and, like ourselves, susceptible to human emotions and reactions. In consequence, it is no more than natural that this factor of our common humanity should enter largely into the equation. Many and many a time, as we newspaper people know, the fate of an individual, of a bill, or some other cherished plan has been settled by a remark at a dinner, a chance meeting in someone's drawing-room, or a brief conference in a library during a few moments snatched at a ball when the absence of the men of the group would not be noted. The wife of a prominent man,—and the senator from a state like New York is bound to be a central figure,—is in a position to make or mar her husband's career. That's the truth, Olga, and you should understand it."

As he spoke, she had fixed her eyes dreamily on a little French print hung across the room. He imagined correctly that she had been projecting herself into the lively arena of the capital, when she replied at last, "Well, I'd like to meet a great many interesting people. That's what I've tried to tell you. I shall be the wife of a great American statesman, and I shall be an American, too, free to seek 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,' " she finished rather grandiloquently.

"Bunk, Olga!" Chaunce answered. "All bunk! And you know it. You take the Declaration of Independence too seriously, or too literally, I should say. We only

enjoy 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness' when we've made all the necessary compromises with convention and society at large." He tapped his cigarette impatiently against a tray to dislodge the ash.

"Aren't you funny," laughed his hostess, clapping her hands like a child. "You're getting cross and cynical, aren't you? Trying to frighten poor little me. Well! Instead you shall tell me what it means—that expression 'rip a friend up the back.' I don't like it. It's horrible. Ugh!" She shrugged her shoulders in disgust and smiled bewitchingly.

CHAPTER XVI

I

JUNE came, and with it a campaign for a final "Victory Loan" to wipe out a national debt. The famous "Four-Minute Men" were again called to speak in theatres, at public and semi-public gatherings to rouse the spirit of the people and gain a proper response. Since his position made Alan Winslow one of the selected men, and his native intelligence and acquired eloquence gave him a power few of the others could equal, practically every day some of his time was spent delivering these brief addresses.

One evening the telephone rang whilst Olga was entertaining dinner guests. Evans brought the message that to fill an emergency, Mr. Winslow was wanted to speak in a vaudeville house up near Columbus Circle. "A singer called 'Gianola,' or some such name, sir, is drawing big crowds and they want a forceful speaker, sir," announced Evans, impassively.

"Thank you, Evans." Winslow turned to Olga: "Will you have them ask the hour?" and to the other guests, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Dangerfield, a young couple who happened to be relatives of the mayor, he apologized. "This is unfortunate, really. I had tickets for one of the new roof shows,—thought you might enjoy a bit of that nonsense on a balmy night like this, and now I'm

afraid I'll have to send you on ahead without me." Secretly Winslow was glad to make a martyr of himself before the nephew of the mayor, who would be certain to repeat the incident. But Alan had reckoned without Olga.

"Pardon me, Alan," she began quickly, before the Dangerfields could speak. "Why can't we go with you first? If Evans doesn't find that it would be too late, I don't see why we couldn't go to both places. I think it would be quite fun, don't you, Mrs. Dangerfield? I've never been to such a theater, and this 'Gianola' sounds fascinating."

Presently Evans came into the dining room, gave his message to Olga and withdrew silently, but not without a swift, calculating glance at his mistress and the man who was to be the new master.

Alan was astounded at the proposal and protested as much as his stiffness of breeding would permit, but Olga had been obdurate and in the end they had gone off in time to reach the theater by nine forty-five. Upon arriving, Alan's temper was by no means improved to find their party ushered back stage and given a corner in the wings. Should it become known around New York that dinner parties in the house of Alan Winslow's future wife terminated in excursions to variety houses, because this was the type of thing she considered novel entertainment? Gianola, an energetic little blonde whose plumpness foretold possible fatness in old age unless she were faithful in diet and exercise, was in the middle of her turn when Olga, Alan and the Dangerfields reached their post of observation, where the two women were given seats on property

chairs waiting to be rushed to their places when the next act but one "opened in three." Olga was frankly interested and a bit excited over this turn of events, especially when she realized that Alan was angry with her. She gazed about with obvious curiosity, noting the ropes and the iron platforms above her head, the electrician's outfit, and the great frames of painted canvas that towered stacked against the walls of the theatre. There were men rushing noiselessly about, shifting scenery and arranging the next set. Several actors stood near, listening to the head-liner's songs.

Then Olga saw a tall young man but a few feet away, standing so that he might watch Gianola's every gesture. His arms were folded and he leaned back against the iron railing of a stairway as though he had been there forever, so motionless that he was at first inconspicuous until Olga grew accustomed to her surroundings. He had dark hair and a foreign air that drew her closer attention, and as she watched, the sight of him seemed to awaken some forgotten memory,—that fine, serious face,—where had she seen it? Her eyes strayed to an old-fashioned watch chain spread in huge links across his vest, with a locket for a pendant. The locket was of glass, to show a little coil of something within. Even as Olga looked, the young man stepped forward to be nearer Gianola when she should finish her last song, and in the mellow glow that filtered through from the footlights, beneath the round glass of the locket appeared a bit of braided dark brown hair shot with gold threads.

Something clutched at Olga's heart. A ring of braided hair! Back through the years flashed her thought to

Marya and that poor servant Feodor, impotent victim of her uncle's fury. Doubt and reassurance surged through her whirling brain. In fancy she was back in her bedroom in the house outside of Pskov taking "solemn oath" with a little peasant girl "to remember and help Feodor." There had been an exchange of these rings of plaited hair, and the two girls had agreed that if either ring ever came to them with a message, they were to know that the tidings were reliable. Could this man be Feodor, in some way escaped from prison and in possession of Marya's ring? Olga tried to think quickly, but e'er she could decide upon a course of action, the young man and Gianola disappeared around a corner of the flies and Alan's voice sounded indistinctly from the stage. With a murmured word to Mrs. Dangerfield, Olga slipped quietly after the couple, whom she found not far away talking in low tones before the door of the star dressing room. Breathlessly she put a hand on the arm of each of them.

"You will pardon me," she gasped, "but I am in haste. I am here with Mr. Winslow, who is giving the Victory Loan speech to-night. I want to know if you will both meet me for luncheon to-morrow. You *must* come, for I have important news." She looked fixedly at the young man, whose face she now saw to be lined with dozens of fine wrinkles. He and Gianola alike were watching her intently. Her grip on the man's arm tightened. "Your name is Feodor?" she asked tensely, satisfied at his almost imperceptible start of amazement.

"Ask me no more to-night, but both of you come to the Purple Bay Tree on West 10th Street,—you can find that,—at noon to-morrow. I shall tell you something of a

little girl named Marya and of one whose name was once Olga von Kranz." Muffled patterings of applause came faintly to her ears. "I must go. Remember,—the Purple Bay Tree at twelve to-morrow." And in this somewhat melodramatic manner she hastened back just in time to congratulate Alan on his speech, of which she had not heard a single word.

"My God, 'Dore," gasped the singer, when Olga disappeared. "What d'yuh make of that? Do you know that dame? A swell like that?" She shook his arm impatiently. "What's the matter of yuh? Come t' tha party, boy; come t' tha party."

"Ah,—I—Oh, it is nothing," said the young man, brushing his hand across his eyes. "Is it a dream I have? She knows my name; she will tell me of Marya and the little mistress? This is the great moment of my life."

"Maybe so, old kid; maybe so! She's a beautiful woman," Gianola looked speculatively at him beneath half-closed eyelids. "H'mh! You must of had a better past that I'da thought, with that queen mixed up in it." She turned toward the dressing room and stood waiting, shoulders shrugged, a hand on her hip.

"What I want to know is this. Is this great moment of your life gonta interfere with my getting any supper t'night, or not? Y' know us in the pr'fession has gotta eat, and eat reg'lar."

Feodor turned away, but not before Gianola had caught the look of commingled sorrow and pain in his face, as one feels the pangs of memory and regret for the things which once were and for other things which once might have been,—all in a far-gone time which will not come

again. Immediately the responsive heart of the singer of popular songs was touched with pity. With gentle gruffness she pushed him toward the iron stairway. "Sit down on the steps and figure it out, kid. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. I'll just get a hustle on myself and then we'll go 'round the corner and hash it out over some spaghetti. Don'tcha leave here without me."

Feodor wanted to dash about the stage, looking for "little Miss Olga," but reason told him to wait; and presently he was busy enough answering the questions of Gianola, in private life Daisy Simmons.

"I always thought you was a queer duck, ever since you moved in that third floor room of Mis' Struthers and began trampin' around next door t'me at four o'clock in the morning. Y' didn't know how thin them partitions was, though. And then I liked to hear your funny langwidge, sorta highbrow even if it does come out sounding kinda queer. But I been for yuh, right from the word 'go.'

"I never asked no questions before, and I been sewing on buttons, and darning for you, and lettin' you follow me ever since that time the plastering fell offa the ceiling in both our rooms and we got talking together out in the hall. 'Member? But now, I want to hear about the mystery, and what this classy jane is doin' in your young life. Come on, tell little Daisy while she rolls her own spaghet'."

Black coffee from a thick cup was all Feodor needed to start him on his jumbled tale of adventure, as he watched Gianola's deft handling of fork and spoon. As he spoke

he grew tense with excitement, shaking back his thick hair and leaning forward, elbows on the table.

"It is like this," he said. "I have found the only lady, and she was but a little girl then, who was ever very kind to me before I have met you, except Marya, of course. For you see I was a servant in Russia, where I lived. Things are changed since the great war,—perhaps poor Russia is not yet any better off than before,—but who knows? Fifteen years ago I had risen to be valet for a nobleman, Michael Serov, whose estate where I was born, was located in the west below Petersburg, that we call Petrograd now. You in your free America could never know what it was to have been a servant in those old days." In vivid sentences he sketched for Gianola the events which lead up to his acquaintance with the child Olga, to his arrest and imprisonment.

"For thirteen years I was in the prison at Pskov, with my soul growing dull,—too dull even to be bitter over my unjust fate. The only friend of my life was that girl Marya, who ran away to the city after our master had sold the estate. Her mother and mine had died, and for the others she did not care. Marya had used wisely the money our little mistress gave her. Then Marya had found where I was imprisoned and had taken work in a tailor's shop not far away. Cleverly she would walk past the jail and flirt with the guards and sentries until at last she could safely count them as friends. . . . What I could not tell you of that girl!" Feodor's voice broke.

"Dontcha know where she is now?" asked Gianola, in a sympathetic whisper, impressed by the recital.

A nod of the dark head. "We were to have married. But with the revolution, she joined a regiment like Botchkareva's. Some damned sniper's bullet found her one evening just at dusk when the men's regiments had forsaken their posts and left only the girl-soldiers on guard. Curse the cowardly hides of the men." He looked steadily at his companion. "You must excuse it if I swear sometimes, I, who was once so devout a son of the church.

"But I must continue. Marya baked little cakes for me and hid money inside them, that I might buy cigarettes and liquor and be considered among the aristocracy of the cell in which I lived. Good God! If you had seen that cell! Ten or twelve of us sleeping in bunks; dampness, stuffy air and overheating, vile odors, foul language, and vermin! Eyah! Even now in imagination my flesh crawls with them." He shuddered, involuntarily closing his eyes. "Excuse me for speaking so." Feodor gulped his coffee, now grown cold.

"There were politicals and rebels in the jail who spoke hasty words to me in the interviewing room. Some of them were smart men, who knew what turn affairs would take, and one of them interested himself particularly in me. Before many months he had told me to expect just the sort of revolution which eventually came to open our prison doors. But alas, even the wise Smolnov did not know how Russia was even then being torn with strife and victimized through the Austrian and German intrigues. We had imagined it would be even more wonderful, the liberty we should have, than it had been for the serfs freed by Tsar Alexander."

"My Gawd," Gianola thought to herself as her com-

panion's discourse continued; "Daisy Simmons, you're a babe in arms compared to what this guy is. Holy smokes! An' me feeling high-toned, trying to do a sister and brother act with him!"

"Then came the day when the wardens and inspectors ran noisily up and down the corridors, shouting 'Come out, little brothers; come out. The day of freedom has arrived.' Dressed in our gray convict sacks we crowded out, little brothers; come out! The day of freedom has the reason. The women were let out, too; and there were many reunions among relatives, or neighbors from the same villages. Soldiers were there, crying, 'Join with us, little brothers. Old Russia is no more. Tyranny is abolished forever; take a rifle here and fight with us behind the barricades.' For they had blocked some of the narrow streets with paving stones and furniture and iron gate railings, behind which they shot at soldiers who were still loyal and at the followers of the local government then in power. Nobody really knew for whom he was fighting. But I had found Marya, who got me a place to sleep in the tailor shop, where I also worked for a while, though I did not want to work very much. Smolnov found me again and we had many meetings to talk about a Russian republic, which my group of rebels in the jail wanted to have established. It would not be soviet, nor should the soldiers and workingmen rule; but it would be for all people as you have it here, or as France is free. But we could not do very much. Everyone you met had some scheme for saving Russia; and it was a day's work sometimes just to save your own skin if the local government changed quickly. We who wanted a Russian re-

public were fewest of all, after Kerensky was deposed.

"At last Smolnov thought of sending to America for help. He had a rich merchant who was our friend and would give us money. We decided that our little group of ten, which included two women, after Marya's death, should scatter to all parts of Russia, to France, England, and America, and spend a year or two learning what we could of the plans and ideas of others. At the end of that time we were to meet in some chosen place and report what chance there seemed of gaining help in uniting the great broad land of our fathers. Drawing by lot, I got the slip which said 'America'; so here I am, waiting and watching. In a few months now it will be the day appointed to return." As suddenly and abruptly as he had begun, Feodor stopped talking. "Perhaps I have told you too much," he said moodily, at last, scowling in puzzled fashion at Gianola.

"Lord, man, it's all 'way over my head, I guess, even if you did spill too much dope," she assured him. "But I'm for you stronger than ever, now I've heard all about your life. Gee! You've sure had some excitement, for a young fellow; and I don't see why your idea for making the Russians all Republicans ain't a good one. I'm strong Republican myself, an' I'll be johnny-on-the-spot to vote us Americans a Republican president if us women get the chance to scratch a ballot." She pursued a few remaining strands of elusive spaghetti to the edge of her plate.

"But what I want to know is, how'd this Baroness know who you were? Shouldn't think she could of reckanized you back stage in the dark, an' all."

Feodor fumbled with the locket, unfastening it from

the heavy chain before he handed it to Gianola. "Do you see what is under that glass?" he asked.

"Looks like hair to me," she announced, after a brief, searching glance. Her pale eyes grew wide as her imagination sped to vaguely remembered stories of "atrocities." Was this a relic of some exquisite revenge, or unmentionable horror? "Human hair?" she gasped huskily.

"The little mistress Olga's," he replied, solemnly. "Marya gave it to me before she left for the army. 'Take this ring,' she said, 'woven of Baroness Olga's hair. Keep it always in this locket, where she may see it if chance should bring you two to a meeting. Though she fails to recognize you, she will remember this ring of plaited hair unless her gentle heart has changed since she has grown. If she speaks to you with sympathy, ask for the ring plaited of my hair; and if she can show it to you, you may trust her as you would yourself or me.' The two girls had exchanged these tokens soon after I was sent to prison." He received the locket again, and attached it to his chain. "You see how one might easily notice this. We shall know to-morrow whether this lady is really my little Baroness and whether she has kept the ring which matches this one."

When Feodor had paid the check and they were on the way home, Gianola said with a great effort to be nonchalant, "I don't think I'll go with you to-morrow." She no longer addressed him breezily and familiarly as "Dore," pronounced "Dora,"—a nick-name formerly self-explanatory as such. "Your Baroness won't want a skirt like me horning in."

Shaking his head, he looked at her with grave eyes,

"No! You must come. You have been my friend. The little mistress will be glad to know you."

So Olga found this oddly matched couple next day in the Purple Bay Tree, Bohemian haunt of deep mauve dishes, with tables enameled dark green and ornamented by deep purple bay-trees each put on in freehand by some artist-patron of the place. It was interesting to discover such conceits as the tree Nina McNair had done with a gay little motto lettered among the branches for the observant eye to note, or perhaps Raymond Ingram's with the characteristic "dinkey-birds" perched in the foliage; but to-day these things were not regarded as she hastened to sit down between Feodor and Gianola, who was for once clad in comparatively inconspicuous serge, a costume reserved for her rarely occasional visits to the "home town" claimed of necessity because her mother and father still lived there and persisted in a desire to see her.

Wide-eyed Olga heard Feodor's story which even in repetition enthralled Gianola. The mate to Feodor's ring had been produced from an enameled locket Olga wore, —the same bit of jewelry forever dear to her through its association with Victor's wooing in the old French garden at Twickenham.

"Poor, brave Feodor!" she exclaimed, at length, frankly wiping tears from her eyes, a simple act of sincerity by which she won Gianola's whole-hearted allegiance. "If you could know how I thought of you and prayed for you! How deep an impression the injustice done you had made upon my childish mind! Many a candle burned for you in the chapel of the Dominican Sisters, without lessening the torture in my heart. My family had been responsible

for that cruelty, and I could neither prevent nor make amends for it. And now there is Marya, who has sacrificed her life.

"I dedicated my life to a search for freedom which has led me far from Russia. But now that I have found you alive and well, I can be light-hearted; I can help you to assist our great land struggling there like a bound and enfeebled giant. You must tell me what I may do to work for the Russian republic. You will model it after this broad republic of the United States? Oh, I am so eager! I have found a noble work for myself. There is so much unkindness and pain in the world that we must try to teach the new nation an ideal of strength and beauty which, combined with perfect liberty, shall make Russia unique among the nations of the earth. What if you and I are only two weak souls? Cæsar, Napoleon, and between them even the French Jeanne d'Arc, were only flesh and blood; yet with their inspired purpose what did they not accomplish? It is wonderful,—we shall be the saviours of New Russia; we shall assemble the rest of the faithful and begin our task."

Feodor nodded in solemn acquiescence, eyes intent upon the adored little mistress grown to be this lovely lady in brown, who was even more fervent and ecstatic than Smolnov or the rest had dared to be. It was the same quick sympathy that he remembered in the real "little mistress" of long ago, who had wept when they took him off down the stairs to his imprisonment. Made sad and wise by his experiences, he felt years older than this "Mrs. Renfrew," as the little Baroness said was now her name; he could not know that if his soul had expanded

under the rigor of his life, just so had she acquired a woman's impulsive heart and a brave soul, steadied by worldly encounters. A momentary terror swept him. Here they were like two children venturing into a strange neighborhood; what might they accomplish before life closed in around them? Olga interrupted his musings.

"We must make plans, if you have only a few months longer to stay. How is it in which I may help?" But she had to hear of the devious ways they must needs employ, and the many enemies waiting to set upon them and their country.

"If you could know the wealth of the great land," said Feodor, earnestly. "Perhaps you were too little to realize, but there are minerals and furs and forest lands waiting to be transformed into capital. If only the people might operate mines and organize the fur trade themselves; but I am afraid the British or American financiers, to say nothing of the men from other nations, will come in and exploit our country's resources under guise of helping us establish a government. Great God, why does not someone arise in Russia to unite the people? They are so ignorant, and the nation is so vast." He buried his face in his hands and sat absorbed in thought.

A flash of inspiration came to Olga. "Is there no one you know who could organize a mining company? Why can't we work toward that during the rest of the time you are here? You could take your mining engineer back with you and he would make a beginning. I would be glad to give all my income to finance his work, and in time the mines would pay for themselves and furnish you money with which to operate your government. I am

going to marry this American statesman and I can easily give you all my money."

But Feodor was proud. "You must not give all your money, though your plan for the mines is good. It would be enough to have you here in this country, sympathizing and helping us. We could take some money, perhaps; but we do not mean to be communists."

Again Olga was amazed at Feodor's insight and thought, as well as his facile expression. "You have made much of your time, Feodor. Where did you get such ideas? It must have been difficult to educate yourself so well."

"I was fortunate, little mistress. The men in my cell were educated men, sent there for political reasons. I listened to their conversations, and presently joined in, expressing my opinions. They were sympathetic, and when I told them how I had been a servant, they respected my views more than ever and would answer my questions. One of them taught me a smattering of French and some English, and I read all the books that were sent to them."

"Tell me! Was there any government set up during all this time that came close to your ideal of republican Russia?" Olga was gradually building up a background of the years that had passed since her girlhood. She had watched the Russian situation thoughtfully but ineffectually during the war. Now she was learning first-hand what had happened.

"I think Kerensky could have saved us," said Feodor. "I hope yet that he may come back into power. But it is hard to say. What happens now in Russia brings to my mind what I have read and heard of the French revolu-

tion. So many governments rose and fell and there were decades of upheaval before the republic became an actuality. We must expect this, I dare say. But it is hard, when Russia might be such a power."

"Does Kerensky know any of your little band? Does he know your aims and hopes? Would he not be a strong ally?" Olga's mind was busy with possibilities.

"It is not time to make ourselves known to him," replied Feodor. "We are too weak at present to be of assistance, and any hint of an alliance would only double the enemies for both of us."

The time passed quickly, and in their excited conversation neither Olga nor Feodor realized that Gianola had slipped away. Olga glanced at her wrist watch. "Feodor! It is half-past three! Where do you suppose Gianola has gone? She will think us very rude."

"Ah, we have been talking," he replied, pushing back the little table. "But Gianola,—you must not mind her. It has come time for her turn at the theatre and she has gone on. I must tell you that she tried to have me excuse her from coming this noon. She had some foolish notion that you wouldn't want her, but I said she had been my friend and that you would be glad to see her."

"Indeed, yes! I think she is interesting. That is what I like in this America. All of us can meet whomever we choose and there is no one to criticize. I wish we could make it so in the new Russia. By right people should be free in that great, broad land of magnificent distances."

"'Magnificent distances,'" breathed Feodor. "Ah, that is it! The distances, and the gulfs which must be

bridged. And education is the first problem. The people must be taught to read and write, then to realize that each of them has a right to opinions of his own, provided he can mold his ideas so that they will work for the greatest good of the greatest number. For the present there is only license in Russia, not liberty."

Olga rose, adjusting the soft fur which she wore over her light summer suit. "We must not begin another discussion," she said, smiling ruefully. "I want to talk with you,—so very badly,—but there is no longer time now. I must go back to meet my little son. I am to take him to the dentist. You see, I am not really free, even now. I must be bound by my duty as the boy's mother. But you must meet him; he is a lovely lad, sturdy and straight. He would be a splendid son for new Russia."

Feodor smiled gently. "I should like to see the little master."

"He isn't 'little master,' any more," rebuked Olga, gently. "And I am not 'little mistress.' Those feudal days are over, Feodor. We are brothers and sisters,—working for each other."

"Perhaps yes," Feodor's mild brown eyes were serious. "But I cannot so easily overcome the habit of years. The rest are brothers and sisters, but you and he are different,—little mistress," he finished, in soft defiance.

Olga obtained Feodor's promise to come to luncheon within two days, before she left him. They rode northward together with Feodor bound for the theatre to bring their apologies to Gianola. As they sat on the top of the bus, chatting busily, an open touring car passed them at

32nd Street, going in the opposite direction. Neither Olga nor Feodor noticed it, but the two men riding there had recognized at least one of the couple.

Tom Dangerfield and Alan Winslow, going downtown to a special conference with the mayor in an obscure office, had seen Olga Renfrew in earnest conversation with a strange, foreign-looking young man on the top of a Fifth Avenue bus. Dangerfield met Winslow's eye at the moment the latter was painfully searching his mind for an explanation, and though he had intended some comment, the look on the older man's face had silenced the words on his lips. Whistling sharply with indrawn breath, he looked considerably away at the store fronts and waited for his companion to regain his composure.

II

For two days Winslow made no attempt to see Olga, whilst he pondered over reasons for the embarrassing incident which had almost destroyed the effect of his meeting with the mayor, not only because his own mental balance had been disturbed, but because of the effect the encounter must have had upon Dangerfield. Then fate, choosing to send him to her on the second day, selected the hour when Feodor and she were deep in a discussion at the luncheon table, scattered with remnants of their dessert and a quantity of cigarette butts. Olga was puffing furiously at a cigarette, *defendu* according to Winslow's ideas of proper conduct for women; but for Olga it was an old, old habit come back, along with the memories awakened by Feodor's presence. For a moment, however, when Winslow was announced, she was filled with

consternation. What would he say of her companion? But with the same thought, her spirits rose. She was to marry this man; his influence should be enlisted for Feodor and for Russia. Through Alan Winslow, what might she not be able to do?

"This is our chance, Feodor," she said. "Come with me into the drawing room to meet Mr. Winslow. He shall see you, and be convinced of the need for help such as only a person in his position can give.

"I'm really awfully excited. I hope I don't show it too plainly," she smiled at Feodor as they rose from the table.

But the smile stiffened on her lips and her brown eyes grew wide with amazement as she saw Alan Winslow standing in the doorway, regarding Feodor, the untidy table, and Olga herself with cold, unsympathetic gaze. Unconsciously, too, he sniffed the air, heavy and sweet with cigarette smoke, with such an odd crinkling of his nose that Olga was reminded of some baby rabbits she had once seen at Pskov in her childhood; a ludicrous comparison which, in her nervous enthusiasm, brought involuntary laughter.

She stepped quickly forward to greet Alan. "How fortunate that you have come. You must meet a friend of my childhood in Russia. Mr. Winslow, this is Feodor . . . Feodor——" She broke off abruptly, turning to the latter. "What is your surname, Feodor? Isn't it curious that I've never even thought of it until now?"

"*'Serovitch,'* Madame," he replied, bowing gracefully, for he had been alert enough to realize that he must impress favorably this American who had intruded upon

them so suddenly. "We took our name from your uncle's, because I had been his servant. I am interested to know Mr. Winslow." Feodor bowed again, this time toward Alan, still standing unrelentingly in the doorway.

"We were just going into the drawing room, Alan," resumed Olga. "I'll ring for fresh coffee." She led the way through the French doors into the rose and ivory-tinted room beyond.

Alan followed reluctantly, and said at length, "I had expected to find you alone."

"And you do not," responded Olga definitely, with a shade of gay insolence. "No! Feodor will not remain much longer in America and there are reasons why I must see him frequently. Come,—be friendly with him. He is a stranger in your land and as such demands consideration, at least." Feodor had wandered to the far end of the room and stood with his back to them, studying a huge fan of silk and mother-of-pearl which hung encased near the windows. A swift glance at his imperturbable shoulders, and she came closer to Alan, taking his coat lapels in her fingers. "You must be kind to him. He has suffered in the old life."

But Alan, though it was difficult to resist a desire to take this appealing girl in his arms and soothe away the little frown that ruffled her forehead, loosened her fingers and said softly, "I shall remain here until he goes."

Olga was furious to discover that this time with Feodor would necessarily have to be wasted, particularly when she was just hearing of a delegation which proposed to escort him to Washington for an interview with the

President. Alan and Feodor had nothing in common, and the former's sulkiness prevented the development of mutual conversational interests; but Olga did succeed in bringing the subject around to a comparison of agricultural methods and possibilities in Russia and New York state, in which Alan, his practical turn of mind coming to the fore, deigned to exchange some slight information with the young foreigner.

At last, to Olga's relief, Feodor rose in farewell, and under pretense of walking with him to the drawing-room door, she begged him to telephone in the morning. "You mustn't mind Mr. Winslow, Feodor," she assured him. "He isn't always like this; but he is angry with me for something or other. I must spend the afternoon talking and cajoling him into good humor again. And I will win his support for you, too. Only be sure to telephone me."

Returning, Olga found Alan engaged in absent-minded contemplation of the silken fan with mother-of-pearl sticks. "Perhaps a discussion of fans would have been better for you two," she addressed him a trifle mockingly. "I can't quite understand what privilege you think you have, to come to my house and drive away my guests with your frigid civility." She sat down on the brocade-covered piano bench and tapped the floor impatiently with a slippered foot.

Alan sat down beside her, his reserve melted, and sought to embrace her. His cool hazel eyes gleamed with a mild passion born of what he momentarily supposed to be triumph. But she shrugged his hands away and moved further along the bench. "You're too lovely to share

with any man, even for a luncheon engagement," he declared, half humorously, as though he must jest away this estrangement.

Silence from Olga, before she turned fiercely to him. "Oh, you don't understand. Why should I expect you to realize?" She broke off as impetuously as she had begun, thinking of this man, safe and smug within his own peaceful country, and that other from such a far land, torn and weakened, to be saved only by such steadfast souls as he. But Alan failed even to interpret her thought.

"Ah, my dear! I do understand. That is why I must warn you. Mr. Dangerfield and I saw you, day before yesterday, riding north on top of a bus with a strange young man. Tom Dangerfield is the mayor's nephew, as you well know, and fortunately for me he is a warm personal friend and a staunch political ally. In fact, as I have purposely never told you before, he is really my campaign manager. Yet supposing he were not such a good friend, what would he think, to see the affianced wife of a United States senator-elect behaving so,—I must say it, dear,—so indiscreetly? Wait," he begged, as she suddenly stood erect, so that he had a moment's disadvantage before he, too, stood facing her. "It is astonishing, in view of the fact that I come here two days later and find you lunching with this boy as your guest; I find you tête-à-tête with him over your cigarettes. *Cigarettes*,—after you know how it would hurt me if certain of the voters up-state learned that my future wife is a cigarette fiend."

“‘Fiend,’ bah!” retorted Olga. “You, with your mind, should be able to choose something more original to say. Are you through insulting me?”

The afternoon waned amid a wordy war of opinions and criticisms with honors even, until Olga, sickened at the purposeless wrangling, gave the victory into his hands. For her own sake, she sought return to a plane whereon the old respect and admiration for Alan would be uppermost; without that for foundation, there was nothing upon which to build her future life. Then later (thinking of Feodor’s possible visit to Washington), she won from Alan some hint of the best avenues of approach and had a lesson in the circumstance which surrounds the government of a republic, which is, as she fully appreciated, a necessary precaution even in a land where men are by constitutional law created free and equal. Automatically a portion of her brain sorted the bits of information, that she might retain only those things which would be of value to Russia at some future time.

At five o’clock, Braxton brought Stanbury in from a party, but when the boy caught sight of Alan with his mother, he stopped in the midst of an enthusiastic recital of adventure on the Avenue, where a cab horse had suddenly died in harness, with much resultant excitement. Stanbury seemed always to lose his juvenile self-possession before this man, Olga reflected; what could be the reason, unless it was some instinctive aversion? She remembered her own childish attitudes and intuitions, and in the light of the afternoon’s unfortunate experience, decided that perhaps there was ground for her son’s peculiar

reaction. The whole combination was difficult when she recalled that for the boy's sake, as well as her own, she had welcomed this man to her home.

Presently, however, under the soothing influence of "cambric tea" and cake, Stanbury resumed his narrative, which had terrific accuracy where the writhings of the horse and the remarks of the cabby were concerned. In spite of themselves, Olga and Alan were both amused by the lad's earnestness.

"An embryonic war correspondent," said Alan, when Olga had stopped a repetition of the story by sending her son to Braxton on an errand of fictitious importance.

"Or an impassioned orator," she amended. "We women can't think of our sons as anything less than great statesmen." Although the remark was innocent of direction, Alan's vanity took it unto himself in further soothing proof of Olga's genuine devotion for him.

As he left for his club, to don evening dress before returning to take her to a concert they had planned some weeks in advance to attend, he ventured a parting word even at the risk of rousing another storm of indignation.

"Don't think that I'm unreasonable, Olga, my darling," he said; "but I am so proud of you that I must take every precaution to shield you from your own impulsive self. To please me, do not see this Serovitch, or whatever you call him, often, and above all do not be seen with him in public. If you must meet him, I shall be glad to have both of you as my guests at dinner some evening when we may invite your friend, Lady Pendleton, also. Then there will be no danger of having our motives misunder-

stood. In my position, with the election so near, I cannot be too careful."

He kissed her gently in farewell, as though he were already Senator Winslow bestowing a judicious caress by request upon the infantile offspring of a constituent, an attention Olga scarcely noted. She was assuring herself that Alan was obsessed with this idea of "being careful" and that he could not really mean that she shouldn't see Feodor as often as their plans made necessary.

"I shall be ready at a quarter after eight," she said, making no other comment. Alan loathed being late at concerts, she thought, mechanically. There were so many little things like that that Alan loathed.

CHAPTER XVII

I

THROUGHOUT a busy summer, in which Braxton had taken Stanbury to the shore for two months whilst Olga remained in New York to watch the advancement of the Russian interests, Alan Winslow saw with gratification that every reliable indication pointed toward his election in November. He had been much occupied, and in consequence had been in such a lofty state of mind whenever he saw Olga that it never occurred to him to ask how definitely she was regarding his expressed wishes in connection with the young Russian.

II

Autumn sunlight glinted on the placid waters of the Hudson and tossed bright reflections into the windows of a train rushing through the afternoon toward New York. In the smoking car, a group of men were idly watching the panorama of hill country slip past as they exchanged opinions on the prospects of permanent peace, the possibilities of a workable League of Nations, the predicaments of the Volstead amendment, and similar topics. There was nothing unusual in the appearance of the individuals who made up this coterie of strangers; they were like dozens of others gathered at the same moment in the smoking cars of other trains everywhere from the Pacific coast east-

ward. However, one man on this New York-bound train was Chaunce Preston, returning from a brief visit with a certain actor-manager who was producing a new play in the coming season. Clad in neat gray, from felt fedora to broadcloth spats, he sat with his back to the window reading dramatic notes in a late copy of "Vanity Fair," until the train, rounding the shoulder of Mount Beacon and coming down past Bannerman's Island, slipped between towering boulders and shut out the sunlight. Chaunce glanced up from the announcement of "The Jest" in time to observe a shrewd-looking man two chairs beyond wave his hand eloquently toward the approaching shadow of West Point and launch into a fresh tirade. Catching the name "Winslow," Chaunce leaned imperceptibly forward.

"Yes, sir, he believes in sanitation and public health preservation more than he does in what that place stands for," said the shrewd-faced one, who wore a brown suit inconspicuous in its appointments as was Chaunce's own.

"Well, the war's over, isn't it?" challenged a short, stocky fellow with the Hebrew's unmistakable nose and black hair. "What's wrong with looking after the people's health?"

"Not a thing, my friend; not a thing," assured the first speaker. "But we aren't through with the effects of the war, even if the armistice is nearly a year old. Foch was another humanitarian, when he stopped fighting without killing off all the Fritzies. An' there's things we've got to kill now, before the country's safe."

"What do you mean?" asked two other men, simultaneously, yet without much enthusiasm, as though they were

bored to a degree at which nothing could annoy them more than to sit quietly with their own thoughts for company.

"Well,—there's Winslow, that I was speaking of. He's candidate for United States senator from New York state, isn't he?" The shrewd-faced man looked at his auditors intently. "New York's a pretty important state, and the senator has got quite a lot of influence.

"Well,—now supposing this senator's wife ain't an American by birth and she's got a lot of ties with the old country? D'ye see what may happen if the senator-elect starts out by making more speeches about public health conditions than he does about a program for future armament, say? New York's one of the first places in the country where the enemy would strike. Just like the Huns bombarding London. The morale of this country would go to the dogs, if something happened in New York."

"What do you mean, 'something happened in New York'?" queried the two, again in duet. They were obviously a pair of credulous small-town merchants on a buying trip to the city.

"Oh,—like a bomb explosion in Wall Street, say."

"That'd be the work of Italian black-hand fellows or some Russian socialist, I'd say," broke in the short, stocky man.

"But what would that have to do with Winslow?" asked an older man whose abundant white hair and keen blue eyes made him a striking figure in spite of a certain provincial air. "And besides, you spoke about the senator's wife. He ain't got no wife, the papers say."

"Not now, maybe he hasn't; but he's gonna marry a

mighty good-looking woman just as soon as he gets the election cinched. You see if he isn't. And that won't be all of it." The leader of the conversation fished in his pocket for a fat cigar case, which he opened and passed around the circle. Only the elderly man refused.

Taking advantage of the lull, Chaunce moved toward the group. "Mind if I listen in?" he asked pleasantly. He spread his hands apologetically before him, so that the two missing fingers were noticeable. As he had intended, the shrewd-faced man noted this first of all.

"Lose those in the war, if you'll pardon me for speaking of it?" he asked, making room for Chaunce beside him.

"Grenade explosion," responded the latter. "Wasn't timed properly, and when I pulled out the pin, off she went, '*Whoom*,' before I could drop her. Knocked me backward over a parapet, which was the only thing that saved me from getting blown to pieces."

"Hhh, no wonder you'll be interested in what we're talking about. I suppose you're pretty strong for a program of peace-time armament? Or d'you feel as though you never wanted to see a gun again?"

"I can't say I'm fond of that kind of fighting, but undoubtedly there's something in the old adage, 'In time of peace, prepare for war.' Is that what you were talking about?" Chaunce glanced casually, but keenly, at the others.

"*He* seems to be against this man Winslow, who's running for United States senator from New York state, because he doesn't do much talking about cannon and battleships," explained the Hebrew, nodding toward the principal speaker.

"Now, now, who said I was against Winslow?" the latter challenged mildly. "Sure's my name's Willis, I only meant to point out a few things that maybe the voters of this state wouldn't notice until after it was too late. One of 'em is Winslow's own attitude, and the other is this woman he's engaged to marry. I know for a positive fact that she got out of Canada during the war because she was mixed up in some kind of a plot that ended in a big explosion in one of the munitions factories over there. Now she comes here, and not satisfied to let well enough alone, she's going around with a lot of half-baked Russians that say they're working for a Russian republic, but you can't never tell in times like this. Why, even if they aren't German sympathizers, they may be bolsheviks, or radical socialists, or fellows working for a soviet in the United States like Lenine and Trotzky are putting over in the old country. Or maybe they're gonna stir up labor troubles in this country worse than what they are now. You know you can't tell. And I ask you, is it right for a United States senator to be hitched up with white trash like this woman's crowd?"

"Sho, now, I'm not *against* Winslow, but I think the people ought to know what's going on before they elect him."

The duo of merchants sat up. Here was real peril; who could tell when the deadly soviet might not walk right into their little up-river villages and ruin trade? "Well, say, now," began one of them. "How do you find out all this about the Russians and that woman being mixed up in a big spy plot? I want to know."

"Well, stranger, I'm in and out of the big town quite

a little bit, and I hear things. You know, a fellow that's in the public eye like Winslow is has got to be careful. There's always somebody to find out things that you thought was buried 'way down deep where they'd never be dug up."

As he spoke, Chaunce's impulse had been to demand an apology from this man Willis; his belief in Olga was so firmly grounded. Then he remembered the manner in which he had first met the little Mrs. Renfrew, the strange foreign student of journalism, whom it had been his duty to "shadow" in mild fashion. Could it be possible that after all this woman had deliberately blinded his eyes, had cast a spell of feminine charm over him, that she might be free to continue her schemings. But no,—a memory of Olga's brown eyes, with their direct, level gaze, and his very soul revolted against his judgment. Chaunce looked around the group, now stirred to some earnest discussion which turned at last to an attempt to define the principles of soviet government, and of the socialist labor party. Only the white-haired man in his carefully brushed blue suit took no part in the conversation, but sat staring through the window at the darkening countryside. Presently an early call for dinner sent "Willis" into the diner, where the two merchants followed him like iron filings after a magnet.

At the Grand Central, Chaunce went up the stairs at once to a telephone booth. Calling the Belmore, he had the extreme satisfaction of finding Mrs. Joel Pendleton, not only registered at the hotel, but in her room. He had met Cornelia some months earlier, and first because of their mutual fondness for Olga, had felt

an alliance to exist between them. Later he was of definite help to her when Joel's memoirs and poems were ready for the press, and as he had correctly supposed, it was work in connection with the book which had brought her to New York at this time. "It's Preston talking, Lady Cornelia," he told her. "I'm across the street at the Grand Central. Just got in, but I want to see you at once, if it's possible. May I come over right away? It's something about Olga Renfrew."

Cornelia, being alone, had dined early, and though it was only half past seven o'clock she received Chaunce in the sitting room of her suite in the hotel.

"I am almost constrained to say, 'To what do I owe the pleasure of this visit?'" was her greeting, in the bright tone with which she shielded her emotions. Chaunce thought involuntarily what a splendid elder sister she would have been, a fine example always of gay bravery to meet whatever odds life should offer; it was a tribute to the best of that cherished characteristic, "sporting."

He smiled abstractedly, and Cornelia was aware that his errand was no trifling one. In consequence her amazement increased as Preston's story unfolded, until her troubled gray eyes mirrored his own distress.

"Events occur to remind me continually how unfortunate it was that I should have been out of Canada when Mr. Renfrew died, at the time of that explosion in the Cliffden munitions factory. That's where this spy rumor started, because Olga had known the man who was arrested for his work in directing the plans that culminated in the explosion, which came a fortnight or so too soon

and through some error in their own calculations frustrated their scheme. But it was a story in one of the papers, written by some overly zealous lad, that really caused her husband's death. It will break Olga's heart if she learns that someone has been reviving the story."

"But what about this young Russian?" interjected Preston. "I hate even to think of such a thing, only you know wiser people than ourselves have been duped into championing some beautiful plotter who played on the sympathies of those she had made her friends. My instinct tells me that isn't true in Olga's case, but reason always mocks me. What do you know of him?"

"Merely what Olga has told me,—that he had been valet to her uncle in her childhood. Of course she may be a tool in this boy's hands, but she is so firmly convinced of his honesty that she will brook no interference with her desire to aid Russia. After all, it's a perfectly natural feeling. We do not know the associations which may bind her to her mother's country. Poor girl, she has lived so long without a mother's love that as she grows older and her son leaves his babyhood, why should she not think to do a service in her mother's memory, perhaps? Who of us may judge?"

Preston acknowledged her opinion quietly, thinking, as he spoke, of Lady Pendleton's devotion to her memories. In such revelations, one realized the nobility of womanhood.

"But what shall we do?" He resumed the conversation after a moment. "Olga must be put on her guard."

III

Slightly bewildered by the unaccustomed intricacies of the Grand Central station, Chaunce Preston's elderly companion of the smoking car had taken longer to make his way to a telephone, where he fumbled with glasses and telephone directory, thumbing the pages under "W" until he located an office number. "Murray Hill 7065," answered that "Mr. Winslow could be reached by calling 42 Murray Hill." Another nickel went into the shining apparatus and "Murray Hill 42" in a polite voice offered to take any message for Mr. Winslow.

"I want to speak to him myself," quavered the old man, excitedly. "You tell him, young fellow, or whoever you are, that Robert Pearce from Kinderhook wants to give him a pretty important message. And I won't give it to anybody but him, either," he flared; "you understand?" He scowled at the receiver until the cool, impersonal voice again reached his ears. "What's that? Well,—I don't care if his campaign manager *is* there. All the more reason why I should see Mr. Winslow. You tell him I be a lot older than he is, and that this time I know what I'm a-talking about." In his anxiety Pearce lapsed into colloquialism.

A little later at "Murray Hill 42," which was an office high up in a tall building off the Avenue, Alan Winslow was explaining his willingness to receive "Robert Pearce of Kinderhook" in the midst of an important conference with Tom Dangerfield and three other men in charge of various angles of his campaign.

"I know he'll probably be garrulous," soothed Alan, an

effective figure in conventional evening dress which contrasted definitely with his publicity man's worn gray Norfolk and the business suits of the others. Alan sat somewhat precisely before a flat-topped desk covered with papers, which Dangerfield, at his elbow, had been reading aloud. Two of the others occupied chairs drawn up at the opposite side of the desk, but Miller, the publicity man, sat smoking a pipe on the window ledge, with his feet drawn up to rest on the sill. "But this Pearce, of Kinderhook, is an old friend of my father's and he must have some idea that I'll be interested in what he has to say. We'll try and make him see that we're busy." He leaned back in his chair and stroked his finely pointed beard with a graceful gesture almost feline in its smoothness.

"You were telling us, Miller, about that printing appropriation." And the discussion was resumed until the hum of a buzzer indicated Pearce's arrival.

In the transition from the dusky hallway to the brilliantly lit room, Mr. Robert Pearce's blue eyes were slow to focus upon the object of their search and the men had time to observe with pleasurable surprise the old gentleman whose quiet dignity had again been restored after his telephonic encounter. Alan rose to shake hands.

"It's been some time since I saw you last, Mr. Pearce," was his cordial welcome. "How are things up Kinderhook way?"

"Very well, thank you; very well," Pearce replied, without appearing much concerned over the question.

"May I speak to you privately, Alan?" he asked. "I have just heard something that may be of importance to you in your campaign."

"Well, well, you've come to the right place, then. These gentlemen are assisting me in the pre-election activities." Alan paused to give Pearce the chance to speak, but the latter remained silent, looking carefully at each of the group in turn.

"I'm not so sure," he protested, but Alan interrupted him quickly.

"Come, come, Mr. Pearce, you needn't fear to tell me in front of these gentlemen whatever it is you've heard. They would have to know it sooner or later." Pearce looked searchingly at Alan. "You know I haven't a prison record, or anything of the sort; and I'm not particularly afraid of hearing dire revelations." Tom Dangerfield and one of the others laughed shortly. "Sit down here, Mr. Pearce, and let's have your story. We have a great deal to do yet to-night, and there isn't a second to waste." Pearce sat down, and Alan again took his place at the desk.

"I came down on the train this afternoon," the former began, "in the smoking car; and I got in with some men who were talking things over the way they always do. I wasn't especially interested until one of them, who seemed to be leading the conversation, mentioned your name. Knowing your father and Uncle David and all, I was anxious to hear what a stranger like that would say about you." Miller's feet stirred slightly on the window sill.

"He began by objecting to all these speeches you're making about public health, and wanted to know why you didn't talk more about arming the nation. A little Jew spoke up and said the war was over and wasn't it important to preserve the health of the people; but this fellow

said, 'No,' that the war wasn't over yet, leastaways it might begin again if we weren't careful and there'd be bombings in Wall Street or some other disaster in New York to destroy the morale of the country. Then this Willis, he called himself, said, 'And supposing a United States senator's wife isn't an American by birth and has sympathies with the old country? What's going to happen then?' So I, knowing that you aren't married, speaks up, 'But Mr. Winslow hasn't any wife, the papers say. What's all this got to do with him?' I put that in about the papers just to keep him from thinking I was a friend of yours."

With his last few sentences, Pearce had gained the undivided attention of the company, whose members scrupulously avoided meeting the eye of Winslow, sitting motionless and erect, his unwavering gaze fixed on the litter of papers before him. Alan knew that Dangerfield, at least, was thinking of Olga as they had seen her riding northward on the bus with this Feodor. What more might follow?

"Willis went on to say that you were going to marry the lady as soon as you had the election cinched. Then a young fellow joined us and when Willis saw that he had two fingers off one hand he asked him if he had been in the war, and the fellow said, 'Yes.' So they began all over again and the Jew said Willis was against you, but he said, 'No,' that he wasn't, only he thought the voters ought to know a thing or two before it was too late."

"My God," thought Winslow. "The 'young fellow' may have been Chaunce Preston. If this should get in the opposition papers!"

"Well, Willis kept on talking about how this woman—excuse me, Alan, but that's what he kept calling her—this woman had had something to do with a spy plot across the border during the war, and that she'd had to leave the country. And now, instead of keeping quiet, she was going around with a Russian crowd that might be bolsheviki, or radicals, or people working to set up a soviet in this country and overthrow the government.

"I wanted to punch him for talking like that, but I thought maybe it would be better to let you know first. Maybe you could find out why he was going on so."

Alan had turned deathly pale, and in the silence that followed Pearce's last words he struggled harder than he ever had in his life for self-control. Fear and rage and chagrin and disappointment assailed him, wave on wave, in a tempest of passion. Almost he could have choked Olga with his bare hands, if she had been within reach. At last with a mighty effort, he rose.

"Mr. Pearce," he brought the name out with a queer choking sound. "Mr. Pearce," he forced himself to repeat it more steadily. "You have done me a great service, and some day I may be able adequately to thank you." So great is the force of habit that even in a crisis he spoke precisely. "Where are you staying in town? I should like to know where I may get into communication with you."

"I shall be with my son, Henry, out in the Bronx. His number will be easy to find, since he happens to be the only Henry Pearce, P-e-a-r-c-e, out in that neighborhood." The old man also rose. "That reminds me, I was supposed to telephone Henry as soon as I got in, but I

was so excited over that Willis's goings-on that I called you first."

"If you were going to his home, let my chauffeur drive you there," begged Alan. "It would only be a slight return for the favor you have done me, and the car is standing ready downstairs. Trowbridge," Alan turned to one of the men who had risen opposite the desk, "will you take Mr. Pearce downstairs and give Henderson my order to take him to his son's house?"

"Now that's mighty kind of you, Alan," exposulated Pearce. "Just as thoughtful as your father used to be. And you're getting to look more like your Uncle David every day. Pity he couldn't have lived to see you become a great man; because, as I keep a-telling the folks in Kinderhook, you're going to get this election by a big majority. We're all going to vote for you."

"I'm glad to hear you say so, Mr. Pearce. It is very assuring. Please give my best wishes to all the folks in Kinderhook when you get back." Pearce and Trowbridge were at the door when Alan quietly expressed what might have been taken for a casual after-thought. "By the way, Mr. Pearce, you aren't going to mention this little conversation, nor what Willis said, to anyone else?" He smiled apologetically, at an apparently foolish question.

"Oh, no, sir. No, siree, sir," responded his elderly friend. "Not a word. But after the election I'd like to hunt up that fellow Willis and break his jaw. He ain't even got the right instrument that fellow in the Bible had for slaying all the Philistines." And Mr. Pearce went out, chuckling in solitary mirth at his little joke, much

pleased with his reception and the success of his errand. "I may be old, but I've got some sense left," he murmured to himself, in the luxurious maroon town-car. "I'll make the folks sit up and take notice when I tell 'em I was riding in Alan Winslow's swell automobile. Clear to the Bronx, too; and I'll have Henry's folks to prove it."

But Robert Pearce had no faint idea of the consternation and disillusion he had left behind him. At first the men waited for Alan to speak again, and finally Tom Dangerfield, to break the spell, addressed the rest.

"If that doesn't sound like Blankenburgh's tactics," he announced. Blankenburgh had been campaign manager for the defeated senatorial candidate. "Far be it from me to hand myself any bouquets, but we never would get down to that."

"He picked a good place for his 'plant'—the smoking car of that New York train," commented Fred Ingalls, the fifth man of the party council.

Miller's feet came down hard on the floor, and he leaned against the window sill bracing himself with a hand on either side of his spare frame.

"And at least we've got to keep it from the papers," he observed. "They could do a lot of mischief."

For the first time since Pearce had gone, Alan looked directly at one of the men, as he fixed his glance on Miller.

"Yes," he said. "And that young fellow Pearce spoke of is Chaunce Preston. You know him, Miller. Preston, of the *Gazette*? The only possible thing that will save us from him is the fact that he is a personal friend of mine and of the lady in question." In spite of himself, Alan winced at the reference to Olga.

Miller looked up from beneath a pair of bushy eyebrows, and strove to sound impersonal. "That so?" he inquired. "In that case I don't suppose it would do any harm to talk with him and find out how much he knows about that 'across the border' stuff this Mr. Pearce mentioned? You think we can count on him?"

"Yes," answered Alan, less bitterly in tone than he felt in his heart.

Dangerfield appeared to shrug himself together. He hunched his chair up beside Alan's again.

"Well, old man, it's too bad," he declared, slapping Alan encouragingly on the back, as though to sting him out of this curious lethargy. "But not so bad but what it might be worse, as the saying goes. Luckily for us, we've found out their scheme in time. I guess we can sow a few travelers around among the smoking cars ourselves. We'll get a raft of 'em out in the lobbies of the small town hotels, too, and beat 'em at their own game. This story isn't so hydra-headed but what we won't be able to lop off every lying tongue that shoots out.

"Only, Winslow; I ask you one thing. Will you tell us, man to man, how much of this you know for a fact to be true? I hate to ask it, but in self-defense and yours, for the party's sake, I think we ought to know."

Then followed the most humiliating moments of Alan's life, when he was obliged, as he had foreseen that he would be, to tell something of the fair young woman whom he thought had captured his heart, but who had not bent to his will. He had been so busy during the summer, he explained, that he had had no knowledge of the extent of her association with the Russians; and earlier he had

been too much in love to inquire deeply into the lady's past history. He had not meant to be a traitor to his country, nor to his party, and he gave his solemn promise to break with the lady if necessary, in order to save the election.

Quite naturally, Dangerfield and the rest, from a political standpoint, were wholly satisfied with the turn events had taken; but in his secret heart each man of them thought with a little shudder that this attitude was either most criminally selfish, or else it indicated inhuman devotion to the man's abstract beliefs.

IV

That same evening Olga had been an enthusiastic spectator at a meeting of Feodor's successfully organized Society for Technical Aid to Republican Russia, at which \$100,000 worth of sewing and garment-cutting machines had been pledged for shipment when Feodor should return to the old country.

Coming home in the subway, Olga spoke earnestly to him.

"For weeks now I have been thinking that I would like to go back to Russia and help you there," she said. "All my life I have longed for some great heroic service of this kind. It never came before. During the war I did nothing. But now! I have money, health, brains, and so much willingness. Would it not be better even to give up my engagement to Mr. Winslow, if he does not understand this spirit that urges me onward? Then I might return to join your band and become one of the builders for New Russia. What a life that would be?"

"It is the only way, really, Feodor," she insisted. "I have learned now that even in the United States there is not complete freedom. Freedom is something that exists within the mind of the individual, provided of course that he has become bodily free first. I know, as do not you, my poor friend, that there are degrees of such liberty; and the United States, at least, is unique in the establishing of that personal right. Yet for all that, I believe that now I could be fully as free in Russia as I ever have been on the continent of America, because I think I have taken the fundamentals to my heart. Henceforward, no matter where I go, I shall be free because I am unfettered in my soul."

Feodor smiled at her in quiet amusement.

"You are become more fervent as you grow older," he remarked. "But perhaps I may express my idea?"

"Do not give up the thought of marriage with Mr. Winslow. It is less spectacular, maybe, but it is of great value to our cause. Do not forget the aid which you, and only you, could bring republican Russia through quiet, subtle direction of political channels here. And do not misunderstand me. I do not mean intrigue. Our new nation must be formed without lying and deceit. But as the wife of a United States senator, think how you might put in a word here and there to assure the people of this country that there are some in the great, chaotic land of the white bear who are sincere, and who will keep the faith."

Olga sighed softly, and watched the lights of a station-stop flash into the dark and out again with the speed of

the train. So, it seemed to her, must she give up this bright flash of desire and adventure.

“Well,” she agreed, grudgingly. “Perhaps you are right.”

CHAPTER XVIII

I

BUT morning brought revulsion of feeling when accounts in the papers of the advancing Bolshevik army seemed to indicate such overwhelming successes that Olga cried aloud in the quiet of the gray and green boudoir where Braxton had brought breakfast.

"What is it, Momsey?" asked Stanbury, who came every morning now to eat his toast and flakes and milk with his mother because he was going away to school within the week. "What's the matter?"

Olga looked at her son curiously as though he were some stranger lad.

"My boy," she told him, "I hope that some day, whenever the chance comes, you will not be afraid to fight for the things you honestly believe are right. If I were a man, I should buy a gun and join the Russian army. That country should have ideals, and the people to defend them." She stopped suddenly, put down the newspaper and poured a fresh cup of coffee.

"Your mother is excited, sonny," she laughed gaily. "If you follow this latest advice of mine at school, your reports will be full of demerits for scrummaging. Promise mother you won't go knocking the other boys about! In theory it's noble to fight hard for what you want, but in

real life more often than not you have to wait for experiences to teach you what things are best for you to have. Our own ideas always have to be modified, and there's always some way that we have to be taught, though it isn't always easy.

"Remember that, Stanbury, and don't let them beat you in spirit, even if you do get in a tight place where you can't hit back with your fists."

Solemnly the boy bit into a slice of toast and marmalade.

"Yes, Mother; I think I know what you mean," he responded, with suspicious thickness of tone.

"Be careful," warned his mother gently. "You'll choke if you try to talk and eat, too, with those big bites you take. Tell me, what is it we are to buy for you this morning when we go shopping? Did you bring the list from Braxton, dear?"

From his jacket pocket, Stanbury had just produced a slip of paper when Braxton appeared in the doorway.

"Mr. Winslow, ma'am," she announced imperturbably.

"Oh, I didn't hear the telephone, Braxton," said Olga, looking up from the list. "I'll answer it here. And, Braxton, I want to look at the condition of Master Stanbury's boots when we're through breakfast. You can send for the trays in five minutes or so." Olga reached for the instrument concealed beneath a silk-clad figurine.

"Hand me the 'phone, will you, darling?" she asked the boy.

But Braxton stepped forward, smoothing the broad old-fashioned widths of her ample gray skirt.

"I beg pardon, ma'am, but he isn't on the telephone," she ventured. "Mr. Winslow, ma'am, is waiting out in the drawing room and says he must see you at once."

"Mr. Winslow! In the drawing room at *this* hour of the morning?" Olga echoed, sinking back for an instant against the pillows of the chaise lounge. "Well, I dare say it's something important." She rose from the cushions and began to unfasten her negligee.

"Will you wait, then, Braxton, and help me get into a dress? I'm practically all ready for the street, anyway. I hope we'll not be kept from our shopping, Stanbury. . . . Yes, that brown one, please. And I'll want the short coat that matches it, and the little hat with the brim, later on. . . . Stanbury, dear, you go and read, or amuse yourself for a while. I shan't be long." She kissed him swiftly on her way past. "Come with me, Kwang," she snapped her fingers lightly at the little Peke who had been curled on a cushion beside the chaise lounge.

In the drawing-room, Alan was pacing slowly back and forth in the space between the two east windows, feeling old and worn after a sleepless night.

"Good-morning, Alan," called Olga cheerily from the doorway. "You are up before breakfast. Can I get you some coffee?" But when he turned toward her, she knew he was in a mood she had not yet seen.

"Good-morning, Olga," he murmured, coming slowly toward her down the room. Light from the windows behind him threw into relief the weary lines of his tall figure. He looked like a defeated man, yet when she could distinguish the expression in his eyes, a sudden fear con-

stricted her, for they were quiet and cold as pale green agate in his set face.

"Sit down, Olga," he continued mechanically, as though he were reciting words he might forget if he ceased thinking of them. "I have come to talk with you. I want to be fair."

"Fair?" she repeated. "Fair with me?" In little surprised exclamations such as this, a faint trace of accent was wont to ring with unaccustomed charm; though to-day Alan noted it as an inauspicious sign. "Why, what is the matter with you?" she urged. "You look tired. Sit down here yourself and tell me what has happened."

"No, thank you. I'll not sit down." A second's deliberation and he shot a quick question. "When did you see that Russian, Serovitch, last?"

"Last night," said Olga tranquilly, without a thought of any need for evasion.

"Last night!" he reiterated, in hard, incredulous tones. "My God! And you must have been with him at the very moment Pearce was telling his story!" He looked away from her, his face twisting in momentary agony. "What a fool I've been!" Wounded pride pressed the words from his lips.

Olga stepped closer to him. "What are you talking about? And what is this story?"

"You've got to sit down." He clenched his fists beneath his folded arms. "You're going to listen to me and explain as best you can." Olga sat on the edge of a big velvet wing chair. Logically his mind commenced the recital.

"Early this summer, when you began running after

that Russian, I warned you against indiscretions which I believed you to be committing through possible ignorance of our conventions. I thought you might have misunderstood the degree of liberty we have in this country, in spite of the fact that I expected something different from a lady who claimed to have been acquainted with court circles abroad.

"I was proud and happy when you consented to become my wife. I believed that you knew, however, how essential it was to our future happiness to forget personal plans until I might safely be released for a time by the result of the approaching election, which has, until recently, been prophesied to be overwhelmingly in favor of our party." He paused reflectively. "It seems impossible that I could have been so credulous," he said, and, with a side glance at Olga, resumed speaking.

"I have trusted you, as though you were already my wife, and chary, as a wife should be, of her husband's honor. But how do you regard this trust? I'll tell you. . . . Deliberately you have disobeyed my wishes. Disobeyed them with the consequence that at this present moment the surety of my election stands in grave danger. All because you have insisted upon consorting with this Russian." He turned to her in fierce, quiet, deadly rage.

"What your personal relations are to him do not concern me for the present, but I demand to know of the woman who promised to marry me the extent of the political intrigue this fellow is directing. I have the right to ask whether or not you are involved in another plot as dastardly as the one which forced you out of Canada. I've never asked about your life. I've accepted, without

cavil, whatever you told me to believe, but now I come to you. If this election is lost, it will be because you have——”

But Olga had risen to her feet. Her eyes blazed with a righteous anger, and when she spoke there was pain in her voice.

“Alan!” she commanded sharply. “Stop talking like that. Do you know what you are saying to me? Who has been telling you these horrible things? Answer me.”

“You will please be controlled,” he suggested. “I am very well aware,—only too sadly aware,—of the sinister sound of my words. I have come to you for an answer, and upon that reply depends more than you might suppose.”

Olga pressed one clenched fist tightly against her lips.

“I tremble,” she exclaimed,—“tremble with rage. Listen to me, Alan Winslow, and I will give you the truth—to be believed or not, as you choose. First of all, I shall fling your words back at you.

“You say I have misunderstood the degree of liberty I have? If so, then I am proud to know it. You imply that I have not been careful of your honor. If your attention to the idle words of others is an indication of your care for my good name, then I tell you that we have not the same definition of honor! As for your vile insinuation about my relations with Feodor,—that I shall for the moment try to forget, because I, in my turn, demand an apology for what you have said about my life in Canada.” A sob choked its way to Olga’s lips, and her voice broke. Then resolutely she went on.

“I see now that you would never understand what

those years meant to me, full as they were of unselfish love. Why should I attempt to tell you? I will say this. There are people who will assure you that I had absolutely no knowledge of Eric Holt's plans, no matter how much appearances were against me. My husband died, some said, because of shock at reading that Dodd's story. But however he died, he went loving me and believing in me. That much he tried to tell me with his last breath. But you! Pfah! I think you are too selfish to die. If you could have listened to yourself just now. 'I warned you'—'I was proud and happy'—'I have trusted you.' Nonsense! '*My* wife,' '*my* election,' '*my* directions.' I'm sick of all of it. Do you hear me?

"So I will tell you nothing about Feodor. He has done no plotting. He has only talked to those citizens of the world, who, like himself, wish to see something beside chaos in a great country where millions of people should by right be living happily. Is this intrigue? You pretend that when you have been elected to this office of yours you will work for the good of your people in the United States. You think that is honestly your own opinion, but I say that they were bigger, braver, more noble men than you who made this country, who keep it what it is for those who live here. Life has not been altogether kind with me, and I am not to be wrongly judged if I try to find happiness, or if I make mistakes as I search for it. The freedom I want is not here, because there is nothing for me to do that I might not do in England or France. My soul is a pioneer, and I must follow it to the frontiers of the world.

"Can you believe that?"

Alan looked at her sadly. Whatever love he had came back to remind him how pitiable it was that this woman could not be more restrained in her judgments. He thought of his future, of how close he had come to making the fatal mistake of his life. He should have heeded the Puritan warning which the strain of his Cape Cod ancestry sounded; he should not have thought of marriage with one who was not of his own race. Yet how lovely she was after all,—standing there straight and slender, with magnificent fire in her eyes.

Olga sat down again in the wing chair, and Alan seated himself on the piano bench, facing her. He was alarmed to be a bit unsteady.

"It is nevertheless you who does not understand," he remarked at length. "You are like a child who goes with high spirit into an unknown adventure. You are a head-strong child, and I know now that it is not a person like myself who is fitted to guide you. I am aware of the pitfalls society spreads for the heart that trusts too completely, hence I make it my purpose to avoid them. Perhaps it is because my disposition is suited to a circumscribed life that there is so much horror for me in the unconventional.

"You see, we do not understand each other's reasoning. I am sorry if I have said cruel things," he confessed, "but there was cold fear numbing my brain. You are the first person who has come near to unsettling my life." Courteous as ever, he waited for her to take advantage of the opening.

Steadily she looked at him. "Alan," she answered finally, "we were both close to a sad mistake. It is good

that we realized all this in time before both our lives were spoiled.

"You shall go on to serve your country in your way, and I shall not hinder. I am right in supposing that you will release me from my engagement to you?" She was about to remove Winslow's diamond from her finger, when Evans' emphatic footfalls were audible in the hall. In the drawing room door, he coughed discreetly and apologetically.

"What is it, Evans?" Olga asked.

"Lady Cornelia Pendleton, Madame, and Mr. Chaunce Preston are calling," he replied impassively.

"Very well, you may have them come in." She turned to Alan. "Did you know they were coming?"

He rose from the bench and paced a step or two.

"No—no, indeed," he exclaimed, and waited for them to appear.

Cornelia entered swiftly, followed by Preston. She was most effective in a black tailleur, with perfect accessories of black and white, though just a trifle sombre. Preston, too, was rather more subdued than usual.

"We shouldn't have intruded if Evans had told us you were occupied," said Cornelia, when she had kissed Olga affectionately and greeted Alan. "Please tell us if we are unwelcome. I know this is an unusual hour for paying calls, unless they are of importance."

"Then I take it that yours is of moment," put in Alan, who had exchanged glances as well as salutations with Preston. He wondered whether Miller had spoken to him as yet. "Perhaps I might be excused and come again another time."

"No!" retorted Olga. "You must all stay. Please sit down, for I have something to tell you, Cornelia, and you, too, Chaunce. You may as well know it now. . . ." She drew the ring from her left hand. "I was about to return Alan's ring when you were announced," she said quietly. "If you will permit me."

In utter silence she rose and gave the jewel to Alan, who had advanced toward her. Cornelia and Preston flashed to each other their instant comprehension of the situation. Who had told her of the stories that were circulating? Each of them resolved to let the other speak their errand first, in such a case.

"My dear," protested Cornelia gently. "What is this? Are you quite sure that you want Mr. Preston and me to stay?"

"Please, please," rejoined Olga. "You mustn't think it indelicate of me to make you witness my action. I need you, need you both; that is why I want you to stay. I don't know why you came, but you must hear what has happened first."

In rapid sentences she told them the gist of Alan's words, without betraying his perturbation, or inferring that there had been high words between them. As he listened, Alan's soul swelled with a new pride, born of her consideration.

"I was just about to decide my own plans, when you came," she continued.

"May I ask one question?" interrupted Alan, leaning forward in his chair.

"Don't you believe, Lady Pendleton," he addressed

Cornelia, "that it was perfectly natural for me to have been concerned over these stories? And wouldn't a man want to know the truth about them, from the lips of his future wife? Particularly when so much was at stake?"

Cornelia looked at him gravely.

"Yes, I dare say it was natural," she commented, speaking slowly and thoughtfully. "But if a man really loved a woman, he wouldn't presuppose too much—do you think? . . . And certainly anyone who cared for our little Olga here would never believe her to be guilty of such charges of treason and duplicity. I couldn't quite understand that."

"But so much was involved," faltered Alan, wondering at the same time why he persisted in this attempt at self-justification. "Do you get my point, Preston?"

The latter was silent a moment.

"Ye-es," he drawled, "I think so. But the fact of your desire to save the election surely couldn't have driven you to believe these groundless whispered charges against Olga. A man shouldn't take every word of smoking room gossip for gospel."

"Smoking room gossip," repeated Olga, in amazement. "You don't mean that my affairs have become public property?"

"Not that, Olga," assured Preston. "Winslow's political enemies were just trying to stir up a little trouble. But we'll make them shut their mouths in double-quick time, don't you fear."

Olga went suddenly to sit beside Cornelia on the davenport. The elder woman took her hand in ready sympathy,

and though Olga smiled at all of them in a shaky imitation of buoyancy, she gripped Cornelia's hand tightly for reassurance.

"You dear people mustn't mind me," she insisted. "All this discussion isn't necessary at all, because in these last few minutes I've made up my mind positively. You mustn't feel sorry for me, because I'm going to do the thing I should have done the moment Victor died. It's the best and happiest solution.

"I shall leave the United States and go back to Russia. There are relatives in England, though purposely I have not heard from them often since I left Canada, who would watch over my boy if I put him in school,—his father's school." She looked at Cornelia. "You know I've just been getting him ready to go to a place up in Connecticut. Then I would return to Pskov, to see what was left of the estate. I've never known how much fighting has been near the place.

"What I'll do after that I can't say exactly, but at least I shall try to live a useful life. Surely I should have learned how by this time. And if I meet anyone who is eager and restless, I shall help him to get away and try his wings. That feeling, that yearning, is what has urged me on from girlhood; it is what sends me back now, with my wings just a little battered, to the nest I left as a fledgling."

Alan straightened uneasily in his chair, nervously smoothing his hair with the palm of his hand.

"But, my dear Olga, I can't have it seem that you're being driven away to Russia, or anywhere else. Surely that needn't be." There was distress in his voice, for he

had not really thought to lose her so irrevocably as this.

"No, Alan," she replied earnestly. "It isn't that I'm being forced to it. I'm not afraid to stay here for my own sake, yet by leaving I shall only be doing what my heart told me to do long ago. Engaging myself to you, whilst I thought to be doing as I pleased, only brought me close to an—oh, how do you say, '*impasse*'? Now I'm actually breaking away for the first time alone, with a glorious, unknown future before me, and I feel my shoulders lighter already. If you will not think me unflattering?"

Her hand trembled involuntarily in Cornelia's warm grasp, so that the other soothed her with the little murmured incoherences that women know.

Preston opened a Dutch silver box on the tabouret near him.

"I say, do you object if I smoke?" he asked, taking a cigarette and drawing the matches toward him. "Any of you have one?" He offered the box to Alan and the ladies, who refused.

"Perhaps I ought to have taken one," Olga observed, in an attempt at gay unconcern, with very human perversity of disposition in an emotional crisis.

"Well," declared Preston, watching the smoke rise in blue mistiness, "I can't say that I like the thought of having you leave us, Olga. I'll be lost without you. And here's my sole attempt at match-making come to naught. It's a wonder to me how you can leave without some feeling of bitterness; you've always had such queer notions of democracy, even when you were most conscious of your own ancestry. That's what made you such a fascinating

puzzle to me, because I don't believe you knew yourself what you wanted."

"Oh, yes, Chaunce," replied Olga, eagerly, glad to have the conversation turned from the painfully personal.

"I don't think any of you quite appreciated what I expected to find in this country. Across the water, as you know, Cornelia, we've been taught that everyone here is equal. You really believe that, and you come as close to making it truth perhaps as it is possible for human beings to do. But beyond that is where I made my mistake. I had expected to find a different race,—not the same kind of people as those I'd ever known before. That's why it didn't seem strange for me to be proud of the fact that my people had been feudal lords three centuries before the beginnings of your country, and yet at the same time feel a sincere interest in people like that plumber,—you remember, Chaunce, the one who also built pipe-organs, and was a real musician.

"It shouldn't have been a question of family, because my blood is more noble than these social upstarts could imagine. There isn't any comparison between their standing and mine, yet it is I who have been left unheeded at their doors because I didn't arrive in their land with a fanfare of trumpetry, and didn't keep reminding people who I was. It wouldn't have been any step higher in the social scale for me to associate with them, still I am made to feel of slight importance beside their 'first families.' Now that plumber, for instance, would have made a splendid nobleman, if he had been born in a different family. But I shouldn't make a habit of going around among the 'people,' because they are always suspected of being

plotters, when they have any brains. Poor things, it's hard for them to be bound by poverty, when the only thing that's responsible, so far as they can understand, is what somebody has called the 'accident of birth.'

"So I shall try to forget everything, but my right to recognize merit wherever I find it. Isn't that an ideal to take back with me?"

"You are a sweet child," said Cornelia. "But I can't help wishing the home folk would keep you with them in England."

"Alan called me a child just a moment ago, too," objected Olga. "It isn't childishness,—what I think."

"It's a determined idealism that makes us all too conscious by contrast of the dust on our own souls," explained Preston. "You make us feel so old and worn, with your freshness, your ability to get up and go on after you've stumbled so many times along the way." He lit a fresh cigarette.

"Ah, yes," Olga acknowledged. "If that is not freedom, then I have gone through all this in vain. There isn't any fear in the world that binds me down to a level of living, and so, ergo, I am free. Why should I not always get up and go on, as you say?"

"But have you really thought of this Russian business so earnestly?" interjected Alan. It was unusual, this feeling both he and Olga had of relief and renewed confidence in each other, now that their lives would no longer be together. Alan longed to protect her from the unknown future she so joyously courted.

"Yes, often," she told him. "There was an injustice done Feodor in my childhood, when he was a young

servant in my uncle's house. Only myself and a little peasant girl knew that he was innocent of the theft for which he was imprisoned. She dared not tell, and I was not believed because I was such a child. For many years I have thought of that, even while I went further and further from Feodor's country, because it was so wrong to give great power indiscriminately into the hands of a few who were lords and nobles. It was barbarism, and I wanted to change it. Then I found myself struggling for identity, lest I should have been drawn into the puppet life about a throne, so I almost forgot Feodor for a time, though not the wrong through which he had suffered so cruelly.

"Now that the war has abolished the power of monarchs, that great land of Russia will find herself as she should by nature be, a strong, resourceful nation, despite these present perils. There are such millions to be helped. I want to go back and do my share, for it is the old '*noblesse oblige*,' after all, which will endure as the best remaining trace of ancient aristocracy. You must know it goes in a brotherly circle."

"You're a brick, Olga," announced Preston, at last, rising to grasp her hand impetuously. "I believe you're going to find the place where they all 'lived happily ever after,' like the princess in fairy stories. Anyway, it doesn't do the old world any harm to have honest souls like you in it."

Standing with her hand in his, Olga pulled Cornelia up beside her, slipping an arm about her waist.

"Will all of you have an early luncheon with me?" she invited. "Let's forget everything but being friends."

She smiled at Preston. "And if *you're* in earnest, you can call the Star line for me and ask when there's a boat for Liverpool. . . . I must go as soon as possible before the election."

Under cover of their bantering, Alan turned once more to stand at the window, unable to trust himself to speak, until Olga had left the room and Cornelia came to offer a word of encouragement.

CHAPTER XIX

I

SAFE once more at No. 30, Grosvenor Square, Olga knew what it meant to be at home again. Alix and Alfred, looking older from the strain of the war-time, had been fairly rejuvenated by their enthusiasm over the cable which told them Olga was coming to bring Victor's son to England; and their preparations for welcoming their "children" knew no limits. Save for a brief note that she was going to New York, they had heard nothing directly since Victor's death, for Olga had been too heart-broken and sad at the time, and fearful lest they had thought her really responsible, to tell them more. She would not have had them feel that she could abuse their friendship and love: it was different when she could return with triumphant spirit and firm purpose. She had not been beaten; she had not gone slinking home whipped. Alfred met her at Liverpool, to Olga's surprise and Braxton's utter satisfaction; at last her mistress had her "folks" once more, and since every good servant measures his own respectability by the respectability of those whom he serves, Braxton's self-esteem rose to the highest of its old levels. Euston Station found a smart motor from Middleton House waiting, with an impatient Alix on the platform; and so after many weeks there were young voices in the gray stone house, and childish footsteps in

the halls. To Olga it seemed incredible to take up even a semblance of the old sheltered life again, painful as it was at first when she missed Victor more keenly; she had found herself half expecting messages and notes, as she had on that long-ago visit, and there were memory pictures of him recalled by the long drawing-room where she had seen the pictures of Canada, the hearth where he had stood, the corner where once had been that great basket of roses.

"If Victor were here, I should think I had died and gone to Heaven," murmured Olga, sipping coffee in the drawing-room on the first evening after their arrival, when Stanbury had been put to bed. "What ages ago it seems since I came running to you for refuge,—and here I am again."

There had been much explanation and confession between the three, for Olga had at last told them the entire story.

"How well I understand, my dear," said Alix. "Had I not lived in England for so many years before the war, had I not been the widow of one English statesman and the wife of another, it would have gone as hard with me, I am afraid, as it did with you. But all that is past, and we can rejoice to be together once more. I am glad that you came home without having married this Alan; you would not have made him happy.

"I hope you will remain with us as long as Stanbury is in school, for Middleton House is your home, you know, and you can't possibly fancy what it means to Alfred and me already to have you and the boy with us. I had not thought life could hold so much joy again."

Flickers of flame from a tiny fire laid in honor of the homecoming darted up from the logs. Olga put her demitasse on the table beside her chair and looked first at Alfred, standing on the hearth, immaculate in his dinner clothes, more gaunt than he had been nine years before, with his reddish-brown mustache more gray; then at Alix, her slenderness a trifle sharpened by the years, though her brown hair showed only the merest thread or two of white, and her choice of a soft leaf-green velvet gown made her seem nearer Olga's own age. These were the dear ones she must leave for the sake of an ideal, which receded into the distance as she tried to fix her mind upon it. Was she weakening with this demonstration of affection? She could not know that it was a very human, very forgivable response to love, the love she had been denied for much of her life. Middleton House! Yes, it was sweet to be there. Alix's voice broke in upon her reverie.

"Did you never have my letter about Michael?" she inquired, startling Olga with her sudden reference to Russia.

"No, Aunt Alix," replied her niece. "When was it sent?"

"A long time ago. After Alfred and I had come back from our trip around the world I found a message for me to say that Michael had been shot and killed in a secret duel at Cannes. He was such a reckless boy. Our blood has always run hot in our veins."

"Will there be any chance of buying back the old estate, do you think?" put in Olga. "Poor Uncle Serov. I can remember what a god he seemed to me."

Alfred glanced speculatively at Olga across his shoulder.

"Buying back the old estate, my dear?" he asked. "Who put that into your head?"

"No one, Uncle Alfred. It has always been there in the back of my brain. That is one of the reasons I am going back."

"Going back?" echoed Alix, in surprise. "Surely you don't mean back to Russia, in this turmoil?"

Olga gravely nodded.

"It will be difficult for you to understand that I must go back," she told them. "Unless I do, I shall spoil everything here, as I have done elsewhere. There is work for me in Russia that no other place in the world affords, and I am the type of person to do it."

"But Olga, I thought you were only sympathetic when you mentioned helping this Feodor in New York. A woman of your training couldn't be of service to the Russian people. And beside that, we want you here."

"Those Bolos are a misguided, ignorant lot," added Alfred. "Their ranks are full of German spies. Have you considered seriously what it would mean if their soviet plan was effective? That country's to be left alone to work out its own future. The Allies got their troops away from the far north, and glad the lads were to be out of the fighting, in a frozen country where the enemy outnumbered 'em by thousands. And there were some of 'em, poor fellows, who didn't get back, whose deaths struck new terror into the rest who saw what savage fiends the Bolos were. Canadians, Americans, Italians and our

our British left the field, not certain whether they were gettin' out through ingenuity or by the grace of the Almighty God, though the odds were decidedly in favor of the latter." He leaned an elbow against the mantel's edge and stared down at the glowing bits of log.

"Y' know, this Feodor chap may have been givin' you a bit of chaff. He'd naturally want to have your money and your interest, but maybe he'd not let on all he knows about conditions. Or else, he may be actin' in good faith enough without bein' better informed than the average.

"I'm not wantin' to judge him, but naturally I don't want a woman of my family, my wife's family," he amended carefully, "goin' out to conditions like that."

"I know," conceded Olga, "and it's more sweet than you can imagine to have someone again who cares so much. Yet it's beside the point, which is that I have to go back. I can't live happily unless I do. Perhaps you'll say I am a fanatic on the subject, but I can't explain why I feel this way. It must be the same devotion that drew some of the *emigres* back to France later in the revolution."

"Yes, and lost 'em their heads under the guillotine blade," broke in Alfred.

"Ah, but not all of them," exclaimed Olga. "Everyone can't be killed, even in a Reign of Terror. Some of the people who remained in France during the whole disturbance came through to wield an important influence in the new state. What if Madame de Staël, or Josephine Beauharnais had been cowards? Or even Madame Roland? . . . Not, of course, that I expect to become a sort of Russian Madame de Staël." She smiled apolo-

getically. "But one can't help from a distance the birth of a new republic such as we aim to make Russia."

Taking the advantage offered by the conversation's turn, Alix left her place to open a heavy writing desk across a corner at the far end of the room. Olga watched her search for a tiny key and unlock a drawer. Pressing a spring within, the false bottom of the drawer slid slowly backward.

"May I see what you're doing?" she called, rising and going toward Alix. "Is it a secret drawer you have in that quaint old desk? How thrilling."

"Yes, dear, it's a piece of furniture someone in Alfred's family brought from Italy centuries ago. Come, look at it, if you choose. But I have something for you." She brought out a fairly small package that weighed heavily in Olga's hand. Carefully wrapped and sealed, it had been sent from some place in Switzerland, to judge from the stamps and post marks, though the name of the town was illegible. "Mrs. Victor Renfrew, in care of Lady Middleton, No. 30, Grosvenor Square, London, England," was written in painstaking, foreign script.

"That isn't Aunt Soscha's writing," Olga exclaimed, turning the packet about for a clue. Quickly she looked at Alfred and Alix, who were watching her. "Oh, do you suppose . . ." her words died in a whisper, as she read their thought. "How long ago did this come?" she asked breathlessly.

"About a fortnight," said Alix. "We were so uncertain of your New York address that we dared not trust this to the mails or the express. Our letter to you about it

must have been just too late. At first we thought your cable was in answer to our message."

"Come over here an' open it," suggested Alfred, who had swung flat the drop leaves of a small mahogany card table which stood against the wall near the grate. "You and Alix sit on the sofa there and I'll pull up a chair. I confess I've been curious ever since the thing reached us."

With the desk scissors Olga snipped the strong fine cords and cut around the seal, already cracked across.

"I don't recognize the coat of arms," she remarked, holding it out to Alix. "It's so badly mutilated by that crack, but it looks like an eagle's wing above a shield. And there's a chevron across the shield."

"What do you make of it, Alfred?" Alix handed the fragment of wax and paper across the table. "It doesn't seem English to me at all, and I'm not familiar with the Almanac de Gotha."

"Three stars on the chevron," commented Alfred. "H'm! I can't think, straight off. We'll . . . I say, what's up?" An exclamation from Olga fixed their attention. She was reading a note, first at hand on top of a light-weight metal box disclosed by the unwrapping.

"Listen to this," she murmured. "It's signed by a man named Gebhardt,—just a few lines. 'In accordance with the last wishes of your respected relative, the Countess Soscha Hohenwald, I am sending to you a box left at the time of her death, which occurred here in Zurich on the tenth day of September. Madame had been in residence at my mother's *pension* for some months, having

been taken ill on her way to rejoin the former royal family of Austria in their exile. According to directions received from a certain Madame Auersperg, who came here soon after Madame's demise, we have accorded the body the ceremonials of the Church and have placed it in a vault until such time as it may be taken elsewhere at the discretion of yourself, whom I have been led by Madame Auersperg to believe, is the lady's nearest living relative.

‘With respect awaiting your reply,
‘Anton Gebhardt,
‘Gartenstrasse, 5, Zurich.’”

Olga's eyes were moist with tears of sympathy, as she finished reading.

“Poor Aunt Soscha,” she sighed. “What a dreadful, dreadful death, in a dreary little *pension* in Zurich! And alone, save for this boy's mother, no doubt.”

“But they were honest,” said Alix. “They have written as they could. I'm sure, if that is their coat-of-arms, they must be nobility in reduced circumstances.”

“This is the twentieth of October, and it says she died the tenth of September?” inquired Alfred. “That's exceedingly quick to my way of thinking. But you'd best see what is in the box.” Alfred forced the small lock with a heavy paper knife and beneath a layer of thin paper was a leather box, its top scratched and worn, though the marks of time had not wholly obliterated the well-remembered Austrian eagle, its double head traced in fine lines of gold. Gently Olga lifted it out.

“One of Aunt Soscha's trinket boxes,” she explained,

surprised to find how emotion recalled connections of the old court life. "I can almost see her now, as I would be allowed to help her dress for some court function. There used to be an emerald pendant in this box, but she had so many jewels."

Lined with purple satin in tight, old-fashioned folds, the box contained a number of smaller packages, done up in tissue which disclosed a ring with three enormous rubies set in big prongs of gold and encircled with diamonds; the broad band of a wedding ring; a great brooch in an exquisite design of fleur-de-lis and delicate, curving tracery covered solidly by brilliant stones, at least eight or ten of the largest swinging below the pin itself in a semi-circular chain; a short string of matched pearls that tumbled from their cotton wrapping to form a pool of lustre on the table; and last of all the solitary pear-shaped emerald, suspended from a setting of diamonds. Even Alix was impressed by the splendor of these treasures piled on a flat velvet cushion she had hastily snatched from a foot-stool nearby. But Olga knew that they were only the merest remnants of her aunt's former belongings. Where was the locket with the Empress Elisabeth's initials done in tiny diamonds, and the single square diamond Elisabeth had once given Soscha? The ruby necklace, the gorgeous tiara, the flashing stomacher worn at the court balls? Even the topaz and silver necklace was missing, the rare old chain which had been a gift to Soscha from her brother's wife when but a bride, an ornament Olga had seen only once, and had never forgotten because it had been bestowed by her mother.

"Oh, Aunt Alix," murmured Olga, "there are so many things missing. These are such a few of all her marvelous stones."

Alfred lifted the brooch, setting the little chain of diamonds a-swing, as they threw flecks of rainbow color about the firelit room.

"Magnificent piece," he observed. "You know there was so much racket at the last, and so much poverty, that I fancy the Countess was fortunate to get away with her life. And you may believe that she'd had to sell some of her precious collection to keep from starving. It's been almost six years since the war began."

"How terribly Soscha must have suffered," commented Alix. "Not so much physically, but in spirit. What pride she had! I think it had its first blow the afternoon of the day you were married, Olga, when von Lainz turned on her, here in this very room."

"She was such a tremendous aristocrat," Olga agreed. "I think that is why she kept the pendant until the last, for the Emperor's famous ring was an emerald, like none other in the world, and it was like Aunt Soscha to have cherished her emerald. If she was proud, she was at least consistent. I could have loved her very much, I know, if she had let me. But always she was unbending, as if there were some reason why she dared not care too much. Once or twice I surprised a tender light in her eyes, but she was quick to hide it and as I grew older, it seldom came any more. I suppose I had disappointed her so cruelly with my stubbornness."

"Ah, my dear, whatever her feeling for you, what ex-

cuse could be given for that attempt to marry you to von Lainz?" reminded Alix. "It was not love for you, at least, that prompted her."

"I've often wondered why she was so determined to have me marry into the court circles. She was hardly natural in forcing me so, and yet perhaps with her training, it was the only natural desire."

"At any rate it's too late now," added Alfred. "Isn't there any message from the Countess herself?"

Looking again into the metal box, Olga found an envelope thick with papers.

"This must be a letter," she declared. "See, my name in her hand-writing." With trembling fingers Olga nervously tore the flap of the envelope and unfolded the missive. Crackling of the tough, wiry paper made the only sound in the room.

"It is dated September, 1910," she exclaimed in astonishment. "Why that must have been just after she returned from following us to Canada. You remember that I wouldn't go down to see her then?" She began to read by the light of the fire.

"The Hofburg, Vienna,
September 1st, 1910.

"My dear Olga:

"As I sit here in the familiar rooms you knew so well, I think of you out in the wilds of Canada with your Englishman. To marry him as you did and leave your own country was only the last of your acts contrary to my better judgment for you. Your treatment of Colonel von Lainz and myself in London I shall not mention. You

might have saved me a double disgrace there, and since you have chosen to break all links with the past, since I could not see you in Brockton, I shall seek to interfere no further; in fact, when you read this, if I have my way once more, I shall be dead and past all caring.

"Remembering how you have taken your life in your own hands, I have decided to tell you at length of the precious possession you have left behind you here in the Hofburg. If fate is kind to you, after I'm gone you will still be able to recover this treasure; if it should pass beyond your recovery before I die, then I will believe that Heaven has punished you in its own way. This letter is to bring you news of your mother, alive and well here in the palace as I write."

Olga's voice rose suddenly to an uncontrolled shriek.

"My *Mother*," she sobbed, dropping the letter and looking at Alix, whose glance reflected her alarm. "Oh, Aunt Alix, what did she mean? It isn't a hideous joke?" The piteous question faltered from her lips. "She couldn't have hated me so."

"Marie," whispered Alix, at the same time. "My little sister. . . . But no! She was killed long ago, or so they said. Read more of the letter; what does Soscha say?" She leaned toward Olga, who again picked up the sheets of paper. But her hand shook with excitement and she found it difficult to follow the lines of writing.

"I can't read it," she cried, tears now streaming down her cheeks. "Take it, Uncle Alfred, I must know what she says about my mother."

Alfred pressed on a light beneath an amber silk shaded

reading lamp, and pulling his chair beside it, took up the letter.

"Steady on, girl," he offered, huskily, clearing his throat.

Alix moved closer to Olga and the young woman buried her face against her aunt's shoulder. Alfred resumed the text.

"H'm,—where's the place? Oh, yes,—here in the palace as I write."

"Many times you have seen her, often you have talked to her; you have loved her, even, without knowing why, and she dared not tell. For your mother is Marie Angela, known here in the Court as the Countess Dericote."

Olga sat up abruptly.

"Aunt Alix, not the Countess Dericote?" she implored. "Oh, I understand so much now."

Alix drew Olga into the circle of her arm, and Alfred read on, to the accompaniment of Olga's quiet sobbing, which gradually ceased as his steady voice developed the story.

"My poor brother Franz, Baron von Kranz, was married to your mother, Marie Angela Serov, a young Russian. Michael Serov is your uncle, true enough, and Alix Middleton your aunt. The estate near Pskov, from whence your income was derived for many years, belonged to your mother's family. As you know, the story told in connection with the death of your father and mother is that they were killed in a coaching wreck in the mountains when you were two years old. That is a lie. Your father was killed, but your mother, her punishment made sharper every day, has been forced to watch you growing up,

without the right to care for you, advise you, nor love you, save as a stranger, the Countess Dericote. You shall have the reason.

“Your mother and father were very happy together. A military life had always interested your father, who was most proud of his rank as a member of the general staff, and of the fact that his father before him, after thirty-five years of service, had gained the patent of nobility, which made the family name ‘von’ Kranz. Your mother was a gay, generous, impulsive little thing—full of life and enthusiasm. After they were married they lived in Vienna, going occasionally to Russia in the summer, where you were born.

“About a year and a half after your birth a certain Count Peter von Brueckholz came to the court from Berlin. He had been summoned by the Emperor in connection with the policy of alliance with Germany which was already being recognized as essential to the future of the Empire. While at the court he met your mother, with whom he began a violent flirtation. My position as one of Empress Elisabeth’s ladies-in-waiting made it possible for me to watch the progress of the affair, which I was naturally most eager to stop. Poor Franz seemed blind to your mother’s indiscretions with the German. (I must say, in justice to her, that save for the fatal arrangement in which it all ended, the indiscretions were innocent enough. Before God, who will have been my judge e’er you read this, I cannot say less.) I thought the time would never come for Count Peter to return to Berlin, and in desperation, I planned to have Franz take your mother for a little excursion into the mountains,

going by easy stages up into Russia, where you had already been sent for the summer that was approaching. But Count Peter heard of the plan. He hastened his preparations for departure, and came to your mother with his scheme. She was to proceed with her packing, as though she meant to go with your father, but at the last moment, he, Count Peter, would have the fastest horses available and together they would race through the country by a mountain pass that would soon bring them to the border and safety. Your mother gave her consent to the wretched business.

"When the day came for the departure of your mother and father, I was at their little house to see them off. Then Franz had a duty at the Burg, a sudden call, which was all the others needed to smooth the way, and like a fool I drove to the palace with my brother, leaving your mother alone. I shall never forget the farewell with which Marie sent her husband away. She was sweet and altogether lovely that morning, and I could not blame Franz for his great boyish sigh of sheer rapture. 'Oh, Soscha! Isn't she a wonderful thing? And all mine!' Poor fatuous lad!

"Just in the hour while Franz was at the Burg, Count Peter reached the house and left again with your mother in the carriage. Then came Franz to me, wild with fear and pain. One of his under-officers had seen Count Peter and Marie driving out toward the northwest, and Franz was to follow them. Andreas Hoyos, the under-officer, had a carriage and two horses even more swift than Count Peter's. Franz whirled off, his poor face white and drawn,

mad with the determination to overtake the culprits. I never saw him alive after that.

“From Andreas came the rest of the story. Franz whipped the horses on and on, up and down the rolling mountain side. By instinct they followed a certain road to the frontier, and at four o’clock in the afternoon, having stopped only to inquire the possibility of a coach having passed that way, they were rewarded with the sight of the fugitives. Count Peter kept the lead, but Andreas’s horses gained gradually until the two vehicles were scarcely a half mile apart. Then they came to a down grade, with a sharp turn on the cliff’s edge midway down the slope,—a famous and dangerous point termed the ‘Devil’s Elbow.’ Count Peter, with instinctive caution as diabolical as the road itself, pulled his horses up short midway on the hill and got around the corner safely. But Franz had been obliged to check his pair so sharply that he could not make the turn in safety, and the carriage went crashing against the rocks. Andreas escaped by a miracle, leaping the wreckage.

“Marie screamed shrilly when she heard the crash, and seizing the reins from Count Peter’s hands in a frenzy stood up in their swaying vehicle and brought the horses to a full stop. In that moment all her love for Franz had come sweeping back over her, together with the realization of her foolishness,—nay, more, what had become her wickedness! Blind with fury, Count Peter tried to hold her in the carriage, but she leapt out and he had no other choice than to follow. As the two ran stumbling back over the road, Andreas, crouching beside the

broken dashboard, drew his revolver and fired. The Count's figure stopped, tottered a step, and fell backward over the cliff. Marie did not look behind her, Andreas said. She came to the carriage, where the twisted body of poor Franz was lying with its head against a stone. 'Oh, my God!' Andreas heard her cry. 'Franz! Can't you speak to me? Oh, my God! I've killed him! My Franz, my poor Franz!' She flung herself upon the body and lay there moaning.

"Andreas wasted no time, but ran up the road and backed the other horses down to the wreck. With some heaven-sent strength he lifted the body of Franz into the carriage, got Marie, weak and sobbing, in beside it, and continued to back the carriage over the splintered fragments of wood, around the bend, and up the hill until he could turn and drive back to town. It was after midnight when he reached the city, where he went at once to Franz's house, and dispatched a messenger for me.

"To be brief and pass over the scenes of horror in those days! With your mother there was but one thing to do. We did not know what details of court politics Count Peter had disclosed to her. His papers had been lost, yet we did not know with what amount of their contents she was familiar. She was a Russian; Austria's understanding with Russia on the Balkan situation was none too secure. Count Peter was German; Austria's necessary alliance with Germany could not be endangered by complications from a Russian source. There was but one thing to do. We had an audience with the Emperor the next morning. Marie, distraught and almost hysterical with grief, was questioned as to her knowledge of Count

Peter's affairs. She said that she knew nothing of policies and the like. Perhaps she spoke the truth, but Austria takes no chances. When they could not wring from her an admission, the Emperor gave his ultimatum. She could not be sent out of the country, lest the information in her possession and her knowledge of the Court be turned against the Fatherland. She was consequently banished to an abandoned lodge up in the mountains, until the Court might forget her. Her death was announced as having occurred with that of my poor Franz,—she had been dashed over the cliff in the accident, was the report. It was simple, such a story, for had I not gone to their house to see them off that morning? The death of Count Peter was reported to us three weeks later from Berlin, a despatch having been sent to the Wilhelmstrasse and to Vienna, announcing that the former envoy had died of apoplexy at Badenhof, whither he had gone for a cure.

“Even your uncle in Russia and your aunt in England heard this story, and no one but the Emperor, Andreas, and myself knew the whole truth. I was given the custody of Franz's child,—yourself.

“As the years went on I grieved more and more for my little brother, and my anger rose against your mother. After a period I began to think of cruel revenges. Then my brain hatched the most sublimely cruel of all. I asked the Emperor (it was ten years after the sad affair, and no diplomatic difficulty had arisen as the result of it) if your mother might be brought to the Burg. I said that I thought she might be plotting to escape unless this were done. The people at court had forgotten Marie;

she could be given an assumed title and a nominal duty. My reason to him was that she might be watched more closely, but the exquisite reason in my own mind was to torture her with the sight of you. She would not dare tell you who she was, and she would be obliged to know you as a stranger, watching others possess your love and the right to share life with you day by day. In my turn I might watch her agony, which she might not show to the rest of the world, and thus my revenge would be complete.

"The rest you know.

"For the first time in my life I am a defeated old woman, and tired. You wonder why this story is so fresh in my mind? It is because I have thought of nothing else. Always in my brain has been that heavy sorrow and the heavier revenge. No moment of my life, not even when my own husband died in battle and they brought him home to me, has been so clear down through the years. So I am able to give it to you in all distinctness. I had determined to tell you when I followed you to Canada, but you know why I have returned with the secret still locked in my heart.

"Do not judge me too harshly, and do not feel that your mother has been made to suffer unjustly. Remember that she killed your father as surely as Andreas sent Count Peter to his death over the cliff. I adored my little brother,—my Franzi, and as I said in the beginning, your mother is still alive. If she has been punished enough, God will spare her to you. Perhaps you will even come back to her from across the sea, but she will be an old woman, too. If you had married a Viennese and stayed

in your country, think of the opportunities you might have had to be with your mother. But no! You were foolish and headstrong, too; and you have run away from her.

"When death takes me, it will not find me sorry for any part in your life or your mother's. If I have a punishment to come, it can be no worse than to have had Franz taken away from me as he was. So I do not send you my love with this letter, lest you should curse it. You would curse a dead woman, and I spare you that. I do not even ask you to think kindly of me. Perhaps you will understand why I have been firm and stern with you. But I did try to be kind, I could not help it; you had Franz's eyes. My love, such as it was, was about you for his sake, and it is for his sake that I have written; for his sake I say simply, 'Farewell!'"

"Soscha, Countess Hohenwald."

Olga sat as though stunned when she had finished the letter. She had long since withdrawn from Alix's embrace and remained motionless, her cheeks growing scarlet and her breath coming in quick little gasps.

"Poor Aunt Soscha," she exclaimed. "But I couldn't have been expected to see her in Brockton," she broke out, as Alfred read "Farewell!" "Aunt Soscha couldn't realize that it was the fear of her that prevented me. I was afraid she was coming to destroy the only happiness my life had known. And she would have destroyed it! No! I should have known about my mother, and perhaps Victor would not have died. Do you think now that my mother is gone, too?" Her eagerness for con-

solation was heartbreaking. "Have I been wicked and killed her? Aunt Alix, Uncle Alfred? Tell me what you think?"

"Stop a minute," said Alfred, who had been scanning the close of the letter. "Here's a fresh bit, dated in this year, about a month before she died."

"I have a premonition that I shall never leave this place alive, and before I die, it is only fair to tell you that your mother escaped into Russia when the monarchy fell. She may have gone back to her childhood home, but even that is six years ago. I wish now, as death draws near, that I could tell you more."

"Well, by Jove!" ejaculated Alfred, tugging at his mustache and rising to pace toward the hearth and back. "Six years ago."

Olga leaned forward, gripping the edges of the little table. Her eyes were shining with an inspired glow, through the tears on her lashes.

"It is like an answer to prayer, it is an inspiration," she breathed, exultantly. "Do you see what lies before me now? Do you see why I was being urged by something within me to return, to help Russia? What would have happened if I had married again in America, and had had this letter afterward?" She rose in triumphant determination.

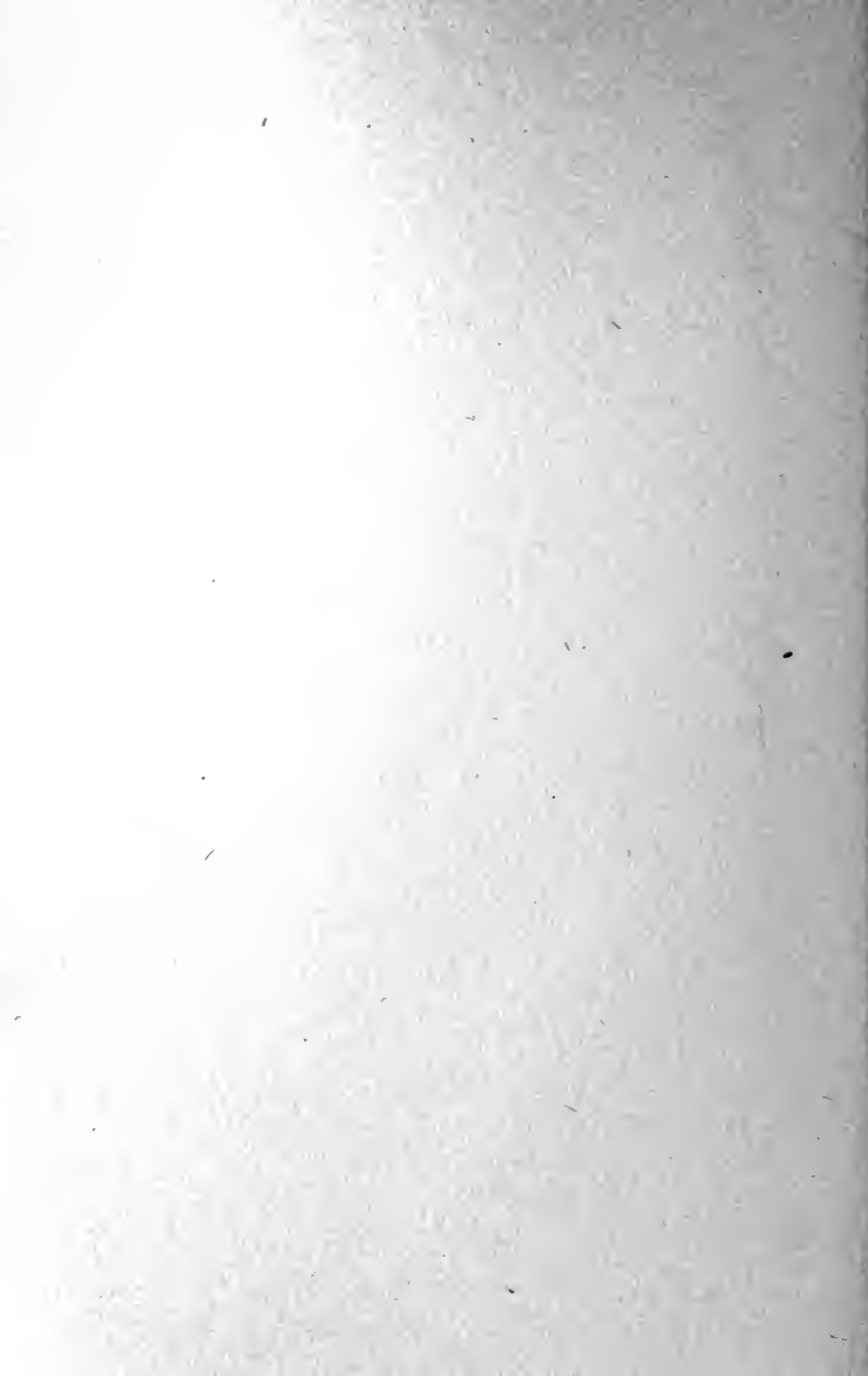
"I must not lose a moment now. Russia holds a treasure for me dearer than freedom, dearer than life. I have two great things to do."

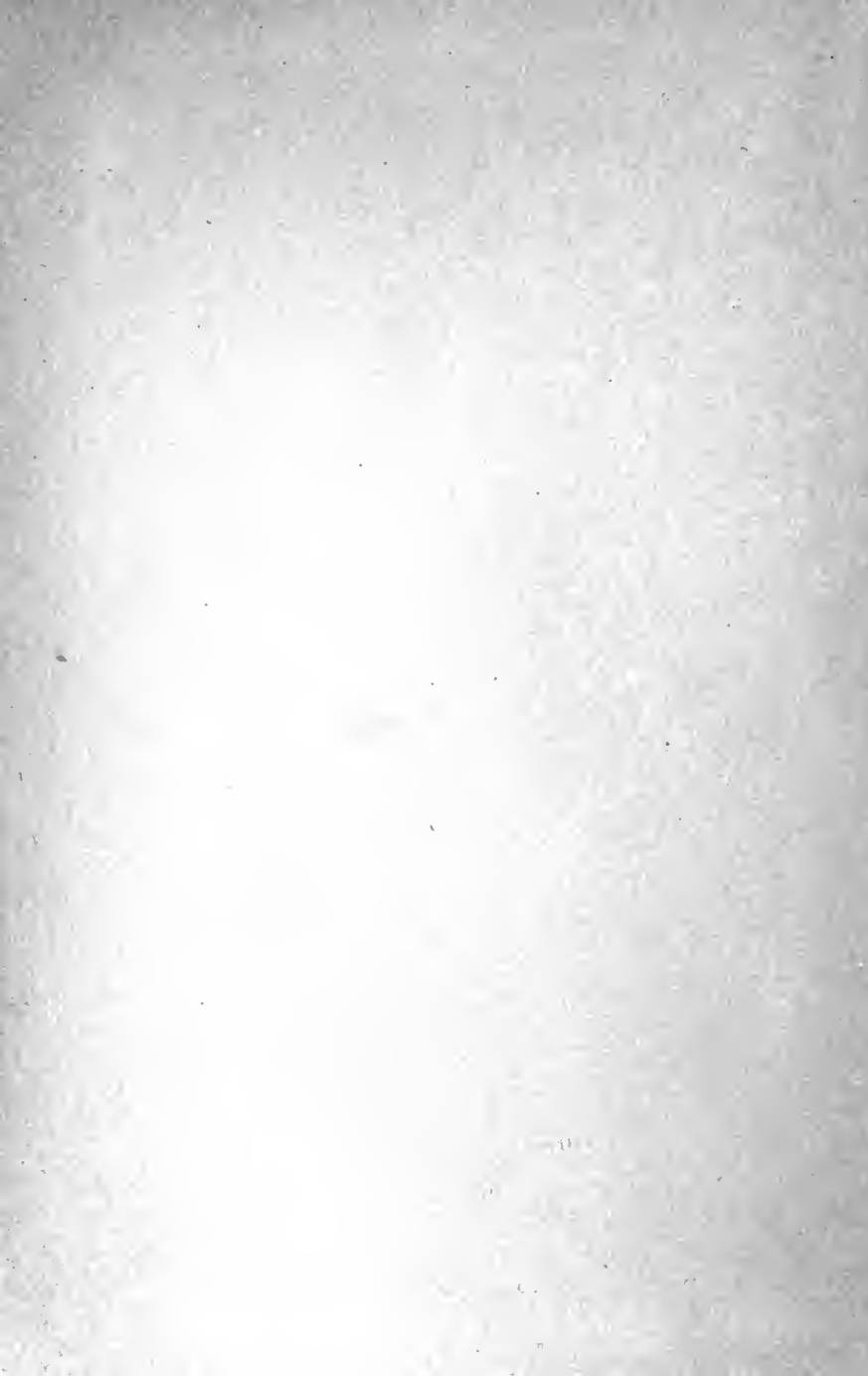
Unsteadily Alix answered her across the table where Soscha's jewels sparkled in a heap.

"Go, by all means," she replied, though her voice falt-

ered a little. "We will do all in our power to help you. But sometime when you have found Marie, will you not bring her back to me? My little sister, whom I have loved in you, without seeing either of you for these many years."

"God only grant that I find her," whispered Olga.







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